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Moses Intercedes for the People

14: 5-19

Moses intercedes for the people DIG: Why did Joshua and Caleb tear their clothes? What is the significance of the Sh'khinah glory here? What was Moshe's main argument against ADONAI? Why was it such a good argument? Do you think God's anger with the Israelites was justified?

REFLECT: In what ways do you suffer the sins of your parents and grandparents? Take a moment to intercede and pray for those who are now under God's judgment. Ask Him to open their eyes to the truth before it is too late. Thank the Lord that He is willing to forgive us for our sins.

Yes, discipline the people for their sin if You must, but please don't totally destroy them for Your Name's sake.

In the midst of this riot of rebellion, only a few voices still spoke of **God's** grace and remembered **His** power. The Torah mentions four such people: **Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb. These** were the only ones mentioned as not being part of the larger, rebellious community. I suspect that **they** are listed because of **their** prominence in the central story. But I also suspect that **they** were not, in fact, the only ones in the entire community who were faithful to **YHVH**. In any period of great apostasy, we (and Scripture) tend to focus on the majority of the rebels and to forget about the righteous of the TaNaKh. **ADONAI** always has a remnant of faithful believers. Certainly this was the experience of Elijah on Mount Carmel (**First Kings 19:10, 14 and 18**). Yet, the only voices of reason and faith we hear in the text are those of **Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua**.

The words of the faithful (14:5-10a): Moshe and Aaron fell on their faces before the entire assembled community of the people of Isra'el, half in anticipation of the divine wrath about to explode upon the people and half in prayerful intercession for Ha'Shem's forgiveness. It was a national rebellion! Joshua and Caleb, from those who had explored the Land, tore their clothes in a ritual symbolic of mourning. They tried to dissuade their countrymen from their foolishness, countering the lies of the majority report, saying: The land we passed through in order to spy it out is an outstandingly good land . . .

their protection (Hebrew: *tzillam*, meaning *shade*) **has been removed from them**. In the hot and arid regions of the Middle East, the concept of *shade* is a symbol of grace and mercy, a relief from the searing heat (**Psalm 91:1**). YHVH had served as a protecting **shadow** for the peoples of the land of Canaan; but now that **protection** was gone. **God** was with **His people**. The faithful declared: **ADONAI is with us! Don't be afraid of them! If ADONAI is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this Land and give it to us — a land flowing with milk and honey (14:5-9).**²⁴⁸

Finally, **they** got to the theological heart of what was at stake: **Just don't rebel against ADONAI. And don't be afraid of the people living in the Land - we'll eat *them* up!** The question was not who was taller or who had the larger fortifications or who had more weapons. Ultimately, all such reliance on human power and estimates was irrelevant. The issue was trusting in the power of **Isra'el's God**. **He** could be trusted to make good on **His** promises and bring **the Israelites** into **the Promised Land**. That fact should have been enough to strengthen **their** confidence, **but the whole community** chose insurrection over submission as they passed the word to gather **stones** to kill **their** faithful **leaders** in whom they had lost confidence. Despite the pleas of **Joshua** and **Caleb** and the prostrate forms of **Moshe** and **Aaron**, **the people** were deaf to mercy and blind to truth. **They** were determined **that** all four of **them** **should be stoned to death (14:10a).**²⁴⁹

The threat of Ha'Shem (14:10b-12): YHVH considered obliterating **Isra'el** there on the spot. **Just then, the Sh'khinah glory appeared in the Tabernacle to all the people of Isra'el (14:10b).** When **Ha'Shem** appeared, **He** did not thunder against **the people**; instead, **He** spoke directly to **His** servant **Moses** about **their** outrageous behavior. **His** words had a sense of disbelief: **How much longer are these people going to treat Me with contempt?** As we think of **God's** promise to bless those who bless **Isra'el** and to curse the one who treats the people with less than a sense of dignity and respect (**Genesis 12:3**), we wonder what must be in store for the one who holds YHVH in **contempt! How much longer will they not trust Me**, this unbelief was the root of the problem (**to see link click [Bz - Faith and Obedience](#)**), **especially considering all the signs I have performed among them (14:11)?** Since **God** was able to defeat **the Egyptians**, **He** could certainly defeat **the Canaanites**. **Ha'Shem's** anger against **His people** was at fever pitch. **He** declared: **I am going to strike this rebellious people with a plague, destroy them, disinheriting them from the covenantal promises of the Land** (see the commentary on **Genesis [Eg](#) - I AM the LORD, Who Brought You Out of Ur of the Chaldeans to Give You This Land**). And **God** could begin again. **With a plague the people** could be reduced to a believing remnant. **Moshe** could be the new "father;" **he** could be **Abraham** brought back to life, as it were. Therefore, **God** said: **I will make from you a nation greater and**

stronger than they are (14:12)! For the second time since the Exodus, YHVH speaks of starting over with Moshe in order to create a new people faithful to Himself (Exodus 32:10). But Moses refused to take the offer that God gave him.



Moses intercedes (14:13-19): To the extent that the expression of the wrath of Ha'Shem was a test of the character of Moshe, we see in his response one of his greatest moments. Not for a second did he mull over the possibility of a new people of God, "the children of Moses!" Instead, zealous for the protection of the perception of the character of YHVH among the nations, Moshe couldn't contain himself, **"When the Egyptians hear about this - [and they will] - because it was from among them that You, by Your strength, brought this people up - they will tell the Canaanites.** It seems that the Egyptians had been keeping track of the migration of the Israelites, hoping that they would eventually return as their slaves. **They have heard that you, ADONAI, are with this people; that you, ADONAI, are seen face to face; that Your fire-cloud stands over them (see Bk - The Pillar of Cloud and Fire); that You go ahead of them in a column of cloud by day and a column of fire by night (14:13-14).**

For Moses, there was something far more important than his own pride and destiny, something even more important than the people themselves . . . this was the reputation of God! If You kill off these people at a single stroke, then the nations that have heard of Your reputation will say that the reason ADONAI slaughtered these people in the desert is that He wasn't able to bring them into the Land which He promised to give them. So now, please, let ADONAI's power be as great (14:15-17).

Even more compelling, **Moshe** invoked **ADONAI's** twelve attributes. **God is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in lovingkindness** (see the commentary on **Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed**) and truth; showing grace to the thousandth generation, forgiving offenses, crimes and sins; yet not exonerating the guilty, but causing the negative effects of the parents' offenses to be experienced by their children and grandchildren, and even to the third and fourth generations (**Numbers 4:18** quoting **Exodus 34:6-7**). So, yes, discipline **the people** for **their sin** if **You** must (see the commentary **Hebrews Cz - God Disciplines His Children**), but **please** don't totally destroy **them** for **Your Name's** sake.

Then, armed with the twelve attributes of **God's** essential character, **Moshe** pleads: **Please! Forgive the offense of this people according to the greatness of Your grace, Your covenantal faithfulness, just as you have forgiven this people from Egypt until now (14:19).**²⁵⁰

Moderns who have rejected the message of the TaNaKh have often done so on the basis of faulty biblical teaching. They have been taught through popular culture and through misinformed teachers that "the **God** of the Old Testament" is a **God** of wrath, whereas "the **God** of the New Testament" is all mercy and grace. It is to **YHVH's** attribute of **lovingkindness** (see **chesed** above) that **Moshe** appeals in **his** plea to **ADONAI** not to destroy **Isra'el (14:18-19)**.

Moses knew **the LORD** intimately. **He** knew **Him** as a consuming fire; **he** also knew **His** warm embrace. We tend to focus on the flashes of **God's** wrath. **Moshe** reminds us that while the wrath is real, it is long delayed. The most remarkable feature of **God's** exercising **His** wrath is how much frustration **He** tolerates before **He** finally acts in righteous judgment. I suspect that there are occasions when we all have wished that **Ha'Shem** would "zap" this evil or reach out and destroy that evil. But the fact that **He** has not yet done so is a loving reminder that **He** may extend the same patience with us as well.²⁵¹

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **Your** wonderful attributes that **You** described to **Moshe**. Then **ADONAI** passed before him, and proclaimed, "**ADONAI, ADONAI, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth, showing mercy to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means leaving the guilty unpunished, but bringing the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, to the third and fourth generation.**" (**Exodus 34:6-7**). Meditating on your outstanding characteristics brings such peace and joy!*

To Abram **You** called **Yourself, God Almighty**. When Abram was 99 years old, Adonai appeared to Abram, and He said to him, “I am El Shaddai. Continually walk before Me and you will be blameless” (Genesis 17:1). As my **Almighty Father** there is no reason for me to worry about any “giant problem.” **Your** presence is always with me (Hebrews 13:5) to help me, and is so much greater and more powerful than any problem! **You** are **the Great King** who, by the breath of **His mouth**, can “fix giant problems” (Revelation 19:15).

Gracious and compassionate **Heavenly Father, You** fixed the giant problem of my sin by sending **Yeshua the Messiah as the Lamb of God (John 1:29)** to suffer and die as my substitute, then you conquered the giant of death by rising victoriously (**Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20-21**)! Thank **You** for being such a wonderful **Heavenly Father** that can always be relied on and trusted! In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen