

## Numbers 12

Good evening and thank you again for joining us. Would you please turn in your Bibles to Numbers 12 please?

Last week we saw the cravings and the complaints. Numbers 11 ended with the people getting so much qual, then God smote the people with a plague.

Tonight, we're going to study chapters 12 through 14, as we witness one of the most devastating moments in Israel's history.

The title of tonight's message is THE COST OF UNBELIEF

Before we begin let's ask for the Lord's blessing.

PRAY

**1 Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.** Exodus 2 tells us Moses married a Midianite woman named "Zipporah". It seems that Zipporah had passed away and he's since remarried an Ethiopian.

And now in verse 1 it appears that Moses' siblings are objecting to an interracial marriage! Ethiopians are black skinned, so it's possible that Aaron and Miriam were guilty of racial prejudice.

But we'll see in verse 2 the root of their complaining wasn't really a color issue, it was a sin issue.

**2 So they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it.** Moses' own brother and sister questioned their brother's God-given authority.

The real issue at the heart of Miriam and Aaron isn't who Moses' wife is, it's the fact of Moses' authority.

Notice Mariam and Aaron don't didn't go to Moses with their concern. Rather they grumbled about it together.

It's rare that people come right out and complain to the source. Rather, it goes on in little huddles and private conversations.

But look carefully to the last phrase of verse 2 "And the LORD heard it." Oh that we would keep this in mind throughout all of our speech!

3 (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.) What a statement! This verse was probably added later by Joshua, because it would be odd for Moses to write this and boast in his humility.

Verse 3 gives us the reason Moses was trusted by God with such incredible authority over the nation. Moses was humble.

Moses didn't start out as the most humble man on earth; remember from Exodus Moses grew up proud and confident in his abilities. It was only that long period of time in the vast desert that humbled Moses and made him a greatly usable man.

The single biggest hindrance to any Christian being used greatly by the Lord, is the oh so dangerous four letter word-SELF. **Isaiah**

**42:8 I am the LORD, that is My name;**

**And My glory I will not give to another,**

**Nor My praise to carved images.**

4 Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. 5 Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. Can you imagine this scene??

6 Then He said,

“Hear now My words:

If there is a prophet among you,

I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision;

I speak to him in a dream.”

7 Not so with My servant Moses;

He is faithful in all My house.

8 I speak with him face to face, pause here. Didn't God say in Exodus 33 “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live?”

How then could God speak with Moses face to face? Face to face is a figure of speech, describing unhindered intimacy. Moses' face was not literally beholding the literal face of God, but Moses did enjoy direct, intimate, conversation with the LORD.

Even plainly, and not in dark sayings;

And he sees the form of the LORD.

Why then were you not afraid

To speak against My servant Moses?” Although Miriam and Aaron didn't want to recognize it, Moses did have a unique calling and equipping, and privilege before the LORD.

9 So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed. 10 And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper. Aaron turns, and before Miriam even realizes it, Aaron sees his sister is now a leper.

God caused Miriam's physical body to display her inner heart.

Whenever you and I nurture negativity and a critical spirit, we also have highly contagious illnesses that just like leprosy, can quickly spread to others.

11 So Aaron said to Moses, “Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned. 12 Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother’s womb!” 13 So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, “Please heal her, O God, I pray!”

This was the first word spoken by Moses in this chapter. He had not spoken the entire time he was accused, leaving it up to God to answer his critics.

When a leader faces accusations are petty, false, or self-motivated, the right thing to do is to ignore them, leave them up to God, and keep busy with what the LORD has called the leader to do. Just as Jesus did **Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,**

**Yet He opened not His mouth;**

**He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,**

**And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,**

**So He opened not His mouth.**

If you choose to defend yourself, God will let you

If you choose to let God defend you, He will.

14 Then the LORD said to Moses, “If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterward she may be received again.” Spitting in the face of someone was a sign of contempt for something despicable, they had done. And here God is describing

the despicable nature of Miriam's heart by shutting her out of the camp for 7 days, and the whole nation would know it.

**15 So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in again.** There's a couple of lessons here for us in this account. 1<sup>st</sup> Aaron was high priest and Exodus tells us that Miriam was a prophetess. Yet they became dissatisfied with their God-given roles. And the lesson for us is to be faithful to wherever God has us.

Second, notice that the entire nation had to stop travelling to the promised land because of the shortcomings of Aaron and Miriam. Point being our sin never just affects us.

**16 And afterward the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran.** **SHOW PIC 1**

## Chapter 13

In chapter 13 Israel arrives on the outskirts of the Promise Land. They camp at the border town of Kadesh. **CLOSE PIC 1**

**1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them."** Now in Deuteronomy 1 we learn that sending men to spy the land was actually the idea of the people. They might have urged Moses to send spies to the land to discover the best approach for conquest. Here, Moses was then instructed by the Lord to proceed with the plan.

We'll see that sending spies was not the issue. The issue is the unbelief that resulted from sending the spies.

Verses 3-16 give us the names of the 12 spies

**3 So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of**

the children of Israel. 4 Now these were their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur; 5 from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori; 6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; 7 from the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph; 8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea[fn] the son of Nun; 9 from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu; 10 from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi; 11 from the tribe of Joseph, that is, from the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi; 12 from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli; 13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael; 14 from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi; 15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi.

16 These are the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea[fn] the son of Nun, Joshua. The 12 spies are listed here, but only two names are ever mentioned again – Joshua from the tribe of Judah, and Caleb from the tribe of Ephraim.

17-25

17 Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, “Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, 18 and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; 19 whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; 20 whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land.” Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes.

21 So they went up and spied out the land from the Wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath. 22 And they went up through the South and came to Hebron; Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak, were there. (Now

Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 Then they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole. They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs. 24 The place was called the Valley of Eshcol,[fn] because of the cluster which the men of Israel cut down there. 25 And they returned from spying out the land after forty days. As these spies toured the area, they saw some of the people and the produce of the land. This remarkable produce included clusters of grapes so big, they had to be carried between two men on a pole.

26 Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 Then they told him, and said: "We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. What God had promised about the land was indeed true. Imagine the excitement of the nation upon seeing the fruit and hearing these words! Until verse 28...

28 Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. The word "nevertheless" means "despite all of that."

29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan."

10 of the 12 spies essentially say 'yes the land is just as God described, but the enemies are huge and they are everywhere'

30 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it." Caleb was speaking from faith – not fear. He

believed God would assure a victory because God promised the victory!

Caleb had his eyes fixed on the grapes and not on the giants!

Remember, the enemies described here shouldn't have come as a surprise, God told the nation these enemies were in the land.

Exodus 3:17 17 and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Taking the promised land wouldn't be easy, but God was going before them!

31-33

31 But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.” 32 And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. 33 There we saw the giants[fn] (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.” The 10 spies unbelieving response was a powerful combination of truth and exaggerations.

It was true from a human perspective that the inhabitants were bigger stronger than the Israelites. But saying, "we are not able to go up against the people" was a lie.

And notice how their exaggerations grow larger as they continue speaking-saying 'we were like grasshoppers in the presence of the giants' shows just how fearful they were.



Unbelief often presents itself as being "factual" or "practical" or "down to earth." Yet, the most factual, practical, and down to earth thing we can do is trust the Word of the living God.

All 12 spies saw the exact same sights - the same grapes, the same men, the same land, the same cities. 2 came away ready to move forward in faith, and 10 others were filled with a sense of certain doom. Their unbelief was not according to the facts, but despite the facts.

Faith or the lack of it, does not result from our circumstances or environment, but rather from our hearts.

Numbers 14

**1 So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.** Because of the bad report of the 10, the whole nation now just falls to pieces. Times haven't really changed much in 3,500 years!

**2 And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness!"**

God displayed His power in the 10 plagues. God has provided for them supernaturally with manna, water, and quail! God gave them purpose and direction and instruction and organization throughout Exodus and Leviticus, and the first several chapters here in Numbers.

And now they are on the threshold of the Promised Land, God invites them to take the land - and they rebelled through their unbelief.

**3 Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" 4 So they said to one another,**

“Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.” The freed nation immediately goes back to what they knew-the familiar life, even though that familiar life was that of a slave living under the cruel bondage of the Egyptians.

Think about this for a moment-they would rather go back to being slaves, than experience the journey of faith God had for them.

This is why so many people will make professions of faith and go right back into the same sinful patterns and lifestyles-right here!

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. It's interesting Moses and Aaron don't try to convince the people. They simply prostrate themselves in prayer.

6 But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; 7 and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: “The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, ‘a land which flows with milk and honey.’<sup>[fn]</sup> 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them.” . Joshua and Caleb plead with the people to stop their rebellion and return to the LORD. They remind the nation there was no need to give in to their feelings of fear.

10 And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Pause here. People who do not trust in the Lord will never understand when you walk by faith, especially when you challenge others that they should walk by faith. Here the nation seeks to kill Joshua and Caleb

Now the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel

11 Then the LORD said to Moses: “How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? 12 I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.”

God doesn't even speak with the nation; He knows they are past hearing Him. He will speak with Moses, and Moses alone.

Many people who are living in rebellion against God wonder why they do not hear the voice of God anymore. Why would they? They've rejected what God has already said.

Here God makes an incredible offer to Moses. God says He will give rebellious Israel what they deserve - judgment and death in the wilderness (which is what they said they wanted back in verse 2).

On top of that, God said He will fulfill His promise through Moses instead!

What an offer!

How does Moses respond?

13 And Moses said to the LORD: “Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, Just as Moses did at Sinai in Exodus 32, Moses interceded for the nation. And he interceded for them based upon the glory of God.

Look carefully at Moses' concern in verses 14-19

14 and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, LORD, are among these people; that You, LORD, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and

You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 Now if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying, 16 'Because the LORD was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness.' 17 And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, Moses is referring to the incident in Exodus 34

18 'The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.'

19 Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." Moses' intercession is nothing short of awe inspiring, isn't it?

I want to encourage you when you pray for America, pray a similar prayer, that God would be glorified through our nation.

20 Then the LORD said: "I have pardoned, according to your word; Underline, highlight, star this verse.

This means that Moses' prayer mattered.

21 but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD— 22 because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, **SHOW PIC 2**

10 times the Israelites tested God by complaining:

1. At the Red Sea (Exod. 14:11-12)
2. At Marah (Exod. 15:23)

3. In the wilderness of Sin (Exod. 16:2)
4. In the wilderness of Sin (Exod. 16:20)
5. In the wilderness of Sin (Exod. 16:27)
6. At Rephidim (Exod. 17:1-2)
7. At Horeb (Exod. 32)
8. At Taberah (Num. 11:1-3)
9. At Kibroth-hattaavah (Num. 11:4-34)
10. At Kadesh (Num. 14:1-3)

## CLOSE PIC 2

Verse 23 is Gods judgment upon the nation.

23 they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. 24 But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it. Caleb-and we'll soon learn Joshua, will be the only ones to to inherit the land.

25 Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valley; tomorrow turn and move out into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea.” Because the adult generation had failed to trust God, He would not defeat their enemies. Therefore, He instructed them to march southeast, away from the Amalekites and the Canaanites.

26-38

26 And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 27 “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. 28 Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the LORD, ‘just

as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: 29 The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. 30 Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. 31 But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. 32 But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. 33 And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. 34 According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection. 35 I the LORD have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.’ ”

36 Now the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation complain against him by bringing a bad report of the land, 37 those very men who brought the evil report about the land, died by the plague before the LORD. 38 But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive, of the men who went to spy out the land.

Notice the terrible irony. Since they wanted to return to Egypt, God sent them back toward Egypt.

Since they feared their children would die in Canaan, God would preserve those very children in the wilderness—and give them a home in Canaan.

Since the adults had rejected Canaan, God would give it to their "children" (v. 31).

Since they feared dying in Canaan, God would let them die in the wilderness.

39 Then Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly. Just like then, today many people are sorry for the consequence of their sin.

But they were not so sorry as to turn their hearts to a genuine trust of the LORD.

40 And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, "Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised, for we have sinned!" They wanted to make it all better with a few religious works and words but their hearts were not changed.

All this was on their initiative, as a way of doing God's will their way, and hoping to reap the same blessings. It could not work.

41 And Moses said, "Now why do you transgress the command of the LORD? For this will not succeed. 42 Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. 43 For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from the LORD, the LORD will not be with you."

44 But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop. Nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed from the camp. What do we see here-the first church split.

45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah. Their plan didn't succeed because God was not

with them. They made a futile attempt in the flesh to accomplish what they had rejected by faith, and it ended in defeat.

When God was with them, they didn't think it was enough; now that God was not with them, they thought they could do it on their own. This is the recipe for certain failure.