



# *Leaves* From the Tree

*Studies from God's Word*

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



NUMBERS 7 -13

## Numbers 7

***7:1-3 - "Now on the day that Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, he anointed it and consecrated it with all its furnishings and the altar and all its utensils; he anointed them and consecrated them also. Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of their fathers' households, made an offering (they were the leaders of the tribes; they were the ones who were over the numbered men). When they brought their offering before the LORD, six covered carts and twelve oxen, a cart for every two of the leaders and an ox for each one, then they presented them before the tabernacle."***

The time frame of this chapter actually takes us back to Exodus chapter 40 when Moses finished setting up the tabernacle. The events of this chapter occurred following the completion of the tabernacle as part of the dedication ceremonies of the beginning of the tabernacle service. That this event was described here in Numbers, rather than in Exodus shows us that while the events in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers follow a general chronology, the primary purpose of the arrangement of the accounts recorded serve a purpose greater than chronology. They are arranged in a thematic order according to the spiritual purpose of the events, and any events described outside of the chronological order are identified like this one.

The focus of this chapter is on the twelve days set aside for the twelve tribes of Israel to bring a dedicatory offering for the care of the tabernacle. The probable reason why this series of offerings was separated from the account in Exodus 40 is that in that chapter the emphasis is on what the Lord had done to cause His tabernacle to be built and how He responded to His house once the construction was finished as He filled the house of the Lord with the shekinah glory cloud of His presence. In this chapter, the emphasis is on the appropriate response of the twelve tribes of Israel to the completion of the Lord's house. Both concerns deserve their own section and so the accounts were intentionally separated in this way.

This offering was not a product of a bright idea by any one tribe of Israel, or even all the tribes together. They brought very specific offerings by the Lord's design which both honored Him appropriately as the Lord of the tabernacle, and also met an ongoing practical need for the service of the tabernacle. Since the tabernacle was designed as a movable structure which would accompany Israel throughout their journey through the wilderness and even into the Promised Land, it was necessary to be able to efficiently move the parts of the tabernacle from place to place as they traveled. The core of this offering was the giving of carts with teams of bulls to carry the heavier items of the tabernacle such as the curtains and boards. The exception to the use of the carts for transportation is that the holy furnishings such as the ark of the covenant were not to be transported on a cart, but on the shoulders of the Levites assigned to that task.

**7:10-17 - "The leaders offered the dedication offering for the altar when it was anointed, so the leaders offered their offering before the altar. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Let them present their offering, one leader each day, for the dedication of the altar." Now the one who presented his offering on the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah; and his offering was one silver dish whose weight was one hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one gold pan of ten shekels, full of incense; one bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; one male goat for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This was the offering of Nahshon the son of Amminadab."**

Verses 10-83 is one of the longest sections devoted to a single subject in all of the Bible. It is also a classic example of a section that most Bible readers simply skip over after the first few verses. The section is really twelve repeats of identical offerings made by the twelve appointed leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel on twelve consecutive days. The repetition is commonly questioned as readers wonder why Moses wrote out each day's identical offering rather than listing the offering once and then summarizing that all the tribes gave the same offering. We should expect there to be a good reason for the extended description with the understanding that the Lord inspired Moses (II Timothy 3:16) to write the description in this way in order to emphasize an important spiritual principle for our benefit.

The principle illustrated in the twelve identical offerings is the significance of shared support of the house of God by the people of God. Each of the twelve tribes representing all of the people of God gave sacrificially in this offering. No tribe bore a greater load than another. Each tribe was trained in this offering to see the value of the Lord and the house of the Lord and to respond with an appropriate gift in honor of the Lord and support of the tabernacle. This lesson is particularly appropriate for the modern body of Christ to learn and apply. Here are two pertinent statistics regarding modern church member giving to the churches that they support with their financial gifts. First, the average church member gives to their church a grand total of 2% of their yearly income. Of course, the Biblical standard of a tithe (10%) for giving back to the Lord from what He has given to us is significantly higher than 2%. The second telling statistic is commonly mentioned in which approximately 20% of the members of most churches give 80% of the total support of the church, while 80% of the members give about 20% of the support total. These statistics do not reflect the Lord's will for church giving, but they do reflect the fairly consistent patterns even among believers. The low giving numbers from the majority are not in most cases due to the church member's not being able to afford to give, but the different priorities revealed by how they choose to use the resources they have.

This passage teaches us that no one tribe was intended to carry the majority of the giving burden for the nation. Each tribe was called to give in a way that reflected their full participation in the support and service of the tabernacle. As the Lord had blessed each one, they were to give in a way that expressed that blessing and the great value they placed upon the Lord's presence in their midst.

***7:89 - "Now when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim, so He spoke to him."***

Moses was the one exception the Lord allowed to the rule that applied to all of the nation of Israel. Other than Moses, no one who was not a Levitical priest could even enter the tabernacle, and only the high priest was allowed through the veil into the innermost room in the tabernacle. The Lord allowed Moses into His house just like He had called him into the cloud of His glory on Sinai. The Lord also spoke to Moses from the Holy of Holies. The presence of the Lord would manifest in the Holy of Holies in relationship to the ark of the covenant. The voice of the Lord would speak to Moses from above the mercy seat and from between the two cherubim. Moses did not see a form of the Lord, but it is clear from where the Lord chose for His voice to be located that His presence was just above the ark. The mercy seat, which was the lid of the ark and the cherubim overshadowing it served to portray that the Lord was spiritually seated upon the ark. The ark was a physical representation of the throne of God in heaven.

The Lord speaking from between the cherubim is another heavenly image. In heaven, there are the living beings called cherubim which fly around the throne of God continuously proclaiming His holiness and majesty. "and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME." (Revelation 4:6-8). The symbolic communication in this exchange between the Lord and Moses from the Holy of Holies was that the Lord was enthroned in the midst of His chosen people. Their lives were centered around the throne. It was this above all else that distinguished Israel from the nations. They among all the nations were living out their lives in right relationship to the One upon the throne.

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## Numbers 8

***8:1-4 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and say to him, 'When you mount the lamps, the seven lamps will give light in the front of the lampstand.'" Aaron therefore did so; he mounted its lamps at the front of the lampstand, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Now this was the workmanship of the lampstand, hammered work of gold; from its base to its flowers it was hammered work; according to the pattern which the LORD had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand."***

There are some details in focus regarding the lampstand in the tabernacle in this section that we have not previously looked at closely. The first is that Aaron was given by the Lord the sole responsibility to mount the lamps upon the lampstand. We saw in previous lampstand studies that the lampstand (menorah) serves as an image of the church in its mission to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16). The overall lampstand represents the church (Revelation 1:20), while the individual lamps represent the individual believers (Proverbs 20:27). The responsibility to mount the lamps on the lampstand was given only to the high priest in symbolic anticipation of the New Covenant. Each believer in Christ is a spiritual lamp that our high priest, Jesus mounts to the lampstand of the church. "But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired." (I Corinthians 12:18). Each of us is assigned by the Lord our own place where we belong in the body of Christ. Our proper place in the church is not determined by our own likes, preferences, agenda, or plans, but by His design and purpose for us. Only the Lord knows that design and so He is the One Who places or mounts us to the church according to that design.

The lamps were all to be mounted in a similar way. They were mounted so as to give the most light in the space in front of the lampstand. These lamps were made with a spout on one side where the wick rose from the oil. Whichever direction the spout with the wick was turned would receive more of the light from the wick. The high priest was to be careful when daily trimming the wicks and filling each lamp with oil to replace the lamps on the lampstands so that the spout was aimed to the space in front of the lampstand. This insured that a greater amount of light would fill the tabernacle since the lampstand was the only light source within the tabernacle. More than just providing a general ambient light to the entire tabernacle interior, this arrangement of the lamps directed a greater amount of light on the space in front of the lampstand. The tabernacle was designed in a rectangular shape with the lampstand positioned on the inside of the south long rectangle wall. On the north wall opposite the lampstand was the table of showbread with its twelve loaves of bread arranged on the table. The result was that there was a kind of spotlight effect directed toward the table and the bread of the presence (bread of face). This symbolically indicated that one of the primary spiritual purposes of the church is to shine the light of testimony on the presence of the Lord in our midst.

It is emphasized again here, as in the original instructions for its construction that the lampstand was to be made of hammered work of gold. The alternative would be to make a mold of the desired shape and pour liquid gold into the mold and allow it to cool in this shape. a pouring process would have made the lampstand much quicker and easier to construct, but at the cost of the strength and integrity of the structure, and the intricacy in the design attainable only by hammering. The hammering process was of a particular kind still seen today in goldsmiths that gold designs by the old method of hammering. The hammer used was nothing large and heavy like for a carpenter's hammer. Instead, this hammer was accomplished with a finer hammer capable of producing intricate details in the gold by a repeated series of tapping blows to the soft gold. By thousands upon thousands of these tapping blows the goldsmith progressively shaped the lampstand from a single large talent of gold (Exodus 25:39). This construction process pointed to the Lord as the master craftsman of the church, shaping us into the glorious design in His mind by the continuing adjustments He applies to the church through His Word. As we remain malleable under His adjustments by maintaining a spirit always willing to yield to the changes required individually and corporately by His Word we eventually develop under His masterful hand into the finished lampstand capable of shining light as we should.

***8:9-11 - "So you shall present the Levites before the tent of meeting. You shall also assemble the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, and present the Levites before the LORD; and the sons of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites. Aaron then shall present the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the sons of Israel, that they may qualify to perform the service of the LORD."***

The Levites were here set apart for their holy service from the remainder of the nation of Israel. The entire nation participated in the dedication of the Levites through the laying on of hands. In laying hands upon the Levites in this way, the Levites were identified as representing all of Israel in their service to the Lord in the tabernacle. They were ordained first and foremost by the Lord, but it was necessary for all the people to confirm their ordination to service through this laying on of hands. The result was that the Levites were identified as spiritually qualified to perform the service of the Lord. This qualification to serve the Lord in this special leadership position finds a New Testament parallel in the qualifications necessary to serve the Lord in the church of the New Covenant in the role of elder. Just as these qualifications must be met before the Levites could enter the tabernacle to serve the Lord, the elders of the church must qualify to serve the Lord in their leadership position in the church (I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9). Those who serve as elders of the church must first meet the spiritual qualifications identified by the Lord. These qualifications are not optional. They do not represent a shifting standard in which a certain percentage of the qualifications must be met, and the rest don't really matter. Like for the Levites, all of the standards named by the Lord must be in place in the life of the one

being qualified for this special service, and those qualifications must be maintained without compromise throughout the duration of their service.

***8:21-22 - "The Levites, too, purified themselves from sin and washed their clothes; and Aaron presented them as a wave offering before the LORD. Aaron also made atonement for them to cleanse them. Then after that the Levites went in to perform their service in the tent of meeting before Aaron and before his sons; just as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them."***

The Levites were prepared for their service to the Lord by a purification process in which all of their sins were first addressed by the necessary sacrifice. In this, we find a parallel to our lives as New Covenant servants of the Lord. All of our service to the Lord must be preceded by our sins being fully cleansed by the death of Jesus on the cross. Our greatest efforts to serve the Lord apart from the cross are unacceptable to the Lord because of the taint of sin upon all of our actions and even all of our intentions. But the cross cleanses those who believe of all sin and makes us clean for the Lord's service. Then, following the purification of their sins by sacrifice the Levites washed their clothing in the way required by the Law. This washing signified the sanctification we experience when we are saved and then baptized in water. Our lives are set apart unto Him and the washing of the clothing conveys this idea. Clean clothing symbolized righteous behavior that was to characterize a life set apart for the Lord.

The third element of the ordination of the Levites for the Lord's service was that they were presented to the Lord as a wave offering. The wave offering normally was performed with an animal that had been sacrificed upon the altar in the courtyard of the tabernacle. Once slain, the priest would take a portion of the body of the animal representing the entire animal and lift it before the Lord. This lifting or waving the animal portion was a visible declaration that the one making the offering belonged to the Lord. Here, the Levites did not offer animal parts to the Lord as a wave offering, but instead offered themselves as a wave offering. They were not slain for this offering, but instead offered themselves as a living sacrifice in all their service that would follow this day. It was a vivid way to declare that from this day forward their life and service were His and not their own. This concept is described as the spiritual responsibility of every Christian in Romans. "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." (Romans 12:1)

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## Numbers 9

***9:1-5 - "Thus the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, "Now, let the sons of Israel observe the Passover at its appointed time. On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall observe it at its appointed time; you shall observe it according to all its statutes and according to all its ordinances." So Moses told the sons of Israel to observe the Passover. They observed the Passover in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, in the wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the sons of Israel did."***

This was the Lord's command for Israel to celebrate the Passover for the second time as a nation. The first time was one year before on the night that the Lord brought the tenth and final plague judgment upon Egypt. Israel has now been in the wilderness of Sinai for a full year, and the Lord's command confirms that the Passover was not to be relegated to their past, but was to be honored every year. This was intended to be the second of an annual national holy day celebration that would continue each year in perpetuity. Israel also responded with admirable obedience to this command of the Lord this second year, but sadly, it was the last such obedience by Israel for many years. Israel does not keep the Passover again until the end of their wilderness journey (Joshua 5:10).

Like with many other portions of God's Law, the emphasis here is on the specific nature of the required response. The Lord wanted them to hold the Passover on a particular day and month on the calendar. They were to obey all the statutes and ordinances of the Passover law. These included all the details of what was to be served in the meal, who was to eat, what their ceremonial condition was to be, what perspective they were to maintain while they ate it, and even what the focus of the conversation was to be during the meal. In other words, the Lord wanted this done a certain way, and any modifications by Israel to the Lord's pattern would not be viewed by Him as healthy innovations, but rebellious disobedience.

The seriousness the Lord attached to the celebration of the Passover and the way Israel responded to it is a helpful model for Christians today. We are not required by the Lord to celebrate this specific feast any longer because Christ is our Passover, having fulfilled on the cross all that the feast portrayed in symbol. The principle of the commands of the Lord and the kind of response to God's commands that He expects of His people very much applies to us. It is a strange thing that many Christians treat the commands of the Lord as though they were spiritual options among which they can pick and choose what to obey and what to disregard. When the Lord commands us to love our enemies, He is not making a helpful suggestion. When He commands us to flee from lust, or to allow no corrupt word to proceed out of our mouth, or to not worry about tomorrow, He expects His disciples to obey Him.

**9:9-13 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If any one of you or of your generations becomes unclean because of a dead person, or is on a distant journey, he may, however, observe the Passover to the LORD. In the second month on the fourteenth day at twilight, they shall observe it; they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute of the Passover they shall observe it. But the man who is clean and is not on a journey, and yet neglects to observe the Passover, that person shall then be cut off from his people, for he did not present the offering of the LORD at its appointed time. That man will bear his sin.'"**

This section leads to an addendum to the Passover law in a sense. It involved the case of a group of men that had been ceremonially defiled from handling the body of a person in the camp. As a result they were not ceremonially clean to participate in the Passover. When they sought out Moses for what they should do in this situation they displayed an excellent example for us. The men did not assume that just because they were unclean that they were free to disregard their own participation in the Passover. They wanted to double check first with the Lord through Moses. When Moses sought the Lord for His ruling in such cases they all discovered that to simply skip the Passover would have been a serious dishonor to the Lord. Since the Passover was a display in symbol of the salvation of the Lord, the person who skipped it, even for one year would be saying by their actions that they did not need the Lord's salvation. The Lord then gave a provision under the Law for anyone rendered temporarily unclean or who was away on a distant journey, that they could celebrate the Passover one month later. That extra month's time was the Lord's gracious allowance of enough time to be restored to a clean condition or return home.

However, the Lord was also very clear that this was an exception clause to the Passover requirement and only applied in those exceptional circumstances. If a person was not unclean at the time of the Passover, or away on a distant journey, and they just ignored or disregarded the requirement to participate, then that person would be cut off from the covenant nation. Remember to be cut off was to lose all the rights and privileges of covenant status with the Lord and Israel. A person that had been cut off was living under the judgment of God and had no access to the tabernacle and could not bring a sacrifice to the Lord. It was as though they had been stripped of their identity as an Israelite and became as one of the Gentile nations. The closest parallel in the New Covenant to the Passover in terms of what the Lord has given us to remember our salvation in a similar way is the Lord's Supper. We should bring a similar serious minded perspective to our celebration of the Lord's Supper. Believers who casually skip eating of the Lord's Supper in church, or skip church altogether with such a perspective of it as optional are missing the significance of what it is designed by the Lord to convey to our hearts.

***9:15-23 - "Now on the day that the tabernacle was erected the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, and in the evening it was like the appearance of fire over the tabernacle, until morning. So it was continuously; the cloud would cover it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. Whenever the cloud was lifted from over the tent, afterward the sons of Israel would then set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the sons of Israel would camp. At the command of the LORD the sons of Israel would set out, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud settled over the tabernacle, they remained camped. Even when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle for many days, the sons of Israel would keep the LORD'S charge and not set out. If sometimes the cloud remained a few days over the tabernacle, according to the command of the LORD they remained camped. Then according to the command of the LORD they set out. If sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning, when the cloud was lifted in the morning, they would move out; or if it remained in the daytime and at night, whenever the cloud was lifted, they would set out. Whether it was two days or a month or a year that the cloud lingered over the tabernacle, staying above it, the sons of Israel remained camped and did not set out; but when it was lifted, they did set out. At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out; they kept the LORD'S charge, according to the command of the LORD through Moses."***

This section is an overview of the relationship the Lord maintained with Israel throughout the years of their wilderness journey. It also identifies the relationship that Israel maintained with the Lord. The focal point of the relationship from a physical perspective was the tabernacle, and the visible evidence of the presence of the Lord dwelling in the midst of the camp of Israel by filling the tabernacle in the form of a cloud. The cloud was not the presence of the Lord, but a visible covering of the glory presence of Yahweh. The cloud was absolutely essential because without the cloud, Israel would have been exposed to the full expression of God's glory and no one would have survived seeing His glory directly. This is the same cloud that had first led them as a pillar of cloud out from Egypt. It was the same cloud that had settled upon the summit of Mt. Sinai where Moses met with the Lord when he entered into the cloud. Once the tabernacle was completed, the cloud settled upon the tabernacle and covered it as the Lord signified by doing so that He had moved into the tabernacle as His house.

The tabernacle was designed to be moved from location to location throughout their journey. The signal that it was time to move to a new location was that the cloud of the Lord's presence which filled the tabernacle would lift from the tabernacle. When it lifted, the cloud remained visible to all the camp of Israel, but now it was clearly in the sky above the tabernacle. When the cloud lifted, the Levites were supposed to prepare the tabernacle for travel, and all of the camp of Israel was to follow their lead and prepare their own tents for the journey. Once the tabernacle was packed and ready for transport, the cloud would move

forward leading Israel through the wilderness. Wherever the cloud would stop, that was their next camping place.

Israel's responsibility was simple in this relationship. Their job was to always keep an eye on the cloud of the Lord's presence. Wherever the cloud was, their responsibility was to stay close to the cloud. Now the Lord did not send out invitations when it was time to move. He did not ask Israel whether they were favorably inclined for the next step of their journey. The Lord set the agenda and He alone decided both when and where they would move next. When it was time to move He did not first take a survey to gauge the preferences of the majority of Israel for the next camping spot or even whether they were ready to leave the current one. The Lord would just suddenly lift the cloud and when He did everyone was expected to immediately drop whatever they were doing and pack for the journey. Considering human nature, there was no doubt some irritated and exasperated people at times as the cloud lifted at inconvenient times or settled in places they would not have chosen for themselves.

This is at the same time a great summary of our own relationship with the Lord. He is the Lord and we are not. He is in charge of our lives and we are not. He determines where we live, how long we stay, and when it is time to move on. The beauty of the relationship is in the graciousness of the Lord to make His direction clear to us and the simplicity of our responsibility to follow Him. As we stay close to His presence we live under the fullness of the blessing of the Lord. If He moves on and we lag behind, or we move forward when He is still camped we face the harsh reality of wilderness life without His protecting, providing, guiding presence.

#### **Questions from Numbers 8:**

**Question:** 8:7 - "sprinkle purifying water on them" - is this where the concept of sprinkling "holy" water came from in the Catholic Church?

**Answer:** It is possible that this is the source of what developed later into the Catholic tradition of sprinkling with holy water for baptism. It is certainly an interesting parallel. There is also a similarity to the location of the laver holding the water just outside the entrance of the tabernacle, and the location of the receptacle for the holy water just outside the entrance to the sanctuary in Catholic churches. I can't say for certain that this is where early Catholic leaders came up with the idea for a holy water receptacle though because I am not that familiar with the origins of the many Catholic traditions that have no basis in the New Testament Scriptures.

**Question:** 8:17 - You touched on the connection between the first born sons of Israel and the Levites a few days ago. Does the Lord still consider the first born sons of Israel His? Verse 17 uses the word "is" - does that mean they continue to be in some respect?

**Answer:** The significance of the word "is" in 8:17 is not pointing into the New Covenant, but is emphasizing at that moment the present ownership of the Lord of all the firstborn of Israel. Don't read it as a "is and always will be" statement. To do so would be reading into the text a meaning that is not there and is not intended. The heart of your question though is whether the natural firstborn of natural Israelites still occupy a special place in God's covenant today simply on the basis of having been physically born into that family. The straight answer to that question is a firm no. First, on a practical level it is impossible for anyone to even know with 100% certainty whether they are descended from Israel today because all of the official genealogical records of Israel were destroyed in 70AD in the fire in the temple in Jerusalem. Going even further back than that, the only tribe of the twelve tribes of Israel that is even partially identified today is Judah (Jews) since the other tribes were "lost" and never restored in the conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians. If 8:17 applied today in the way you are asking it would have to apply to all 12 tribes, not just the Jews.

There is one sense however in which we can say that 8:17 has an ongoing application. It is a spiritual application, not a physical one. "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." (Colossians 1:18). Christ is identified as the firstborn. He has permanent special covenant status with God the Father. Through Him, we who believe in Him are also given permanent special covenant status with God. "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven..." (Hebrews 12:22-23).

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## Numbers 10

***10:1-5 - "The LORD spoke further to Moses, saying, "Make yourself two trumpets of silver, of hammered work you shall make them; and you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for having the camps set out. When both are blown, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the doorway of the tent of meeting. Yet if only one is blown, then the leaders, the heads of the divisions of Israel, shall assemble before you. But when you blow an alarm, the camps that are pitched on the east side shall set out."***

The Lord gave Moses one final task to accomplish before He led Israel away from the camp at Sinai through the wilderness. He was to have made two silver trumpets. These were not like the ram's horn shofar that was used for other purposes, but these were described by the Jewish historian Josephus as straight tubes just under two feet long with a bell shape at the end. The trumpets were to be used to give additional order to the camp and march of Israel beyond the visible signal of the cloud of the Lord's presence lifting and settling. The lifting of the cloud was the signal to prepare to move, and the movement of the pillar of cloud was the signal to set out on the march following the cloud, but the Lord did not want his people following Him in a loose conglomeration of people moving like a giant clump through the wilderness. Each tribal group of three tribes was given an audible signal to move out in order by blasts from these trumpets. The result was that the nation moved in a very orderly arrangement and from a top down view would appear more like an organized army on the march, than a single mass of people. The trumpets were also blown for gatherings of the people in the camp to call them to the tabernacle, but the sounding of the trumpets for the journey was called an alarm. The traveling blasts of the trumpets were an alarm, not because it signaled an emergency, but because they marched on the alert as an army marches, and not as tourists strolling to see the sights.

The trumpets were fashioned in the same hammering process as the lampstand indicating the importance of the construction and purpose of what was made. They were constructed entirely of silver. The symbolic message of silver trumpets is tied to the Biblical concept of redemption. Any time someone was redeemed under the Law, the price of their redemption was measured in silver. The Lord commanded these redemption trumpets blown every time as Israel was setting out in their journey as a continual reminder that all of Israel was the redeemed of the Lord. Any step of progress they made toward the goal of the Promised Land was only because the Lord had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt and made them His own special people.

***10:7-10 - "When convening the assembly, however, you shall blow without sounding an alarm. The priestly sons of Aaron, moreover, shall blow the trumpets; and this shall be for you a perpetual statute throughout your generations. When you go to war in your land against the adversary who attacks you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and be saved from your enemies. Also in the day of your gladness and in your appointed feasts, and on the first days of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be as a reminder of you before your God. I am the LORD your God."***

These trumpets were to be handed down and blown throughout the generations of Israel. The law of the trumpet was a perpetual statute, which meant that it was in force for as long as the tabernacle, and later temple remained standing. There were two main purposes for blowing the trumpets. One purpose was for organizing the people of Israel for the march as the army of the Lord. The other purpose was within the camp (and much later in Jerusalem) to call the people to the tabernacle / temple to worship. Both types of the sounding of the trumpets represented the call of God. The trumpet did not sound a voluntary note. When the trumpets of redemption sounded the people of God were all expected to respond with 100% obedience.

In the same way, the Lord continues to call His people both to war and to worship today. We should not see our response as voluntary any more than they did. When the Lord calls us to battle in order to take our stand as the people of God in spiritual warfare against the schemes of the evil one (Ephesians 6:10-18), we dare not treat it as an optional exercise which we can disregard if it does not suit us to respond. When the Lord calls us to worship Him together with His people (Hebrews 10:24-25), we must not respond according to our own agenda, priorities, or whether we feel inclined to go that particular Sunday. He has redeemed us by the costly sacrifice of His Son. We owe Him a whole hearted response to His call to war and to worship.

***10:33-36 - "Thus they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD journeying in front of them for the three days, to seek out a resting place for them. The cloud of the LORD was over them by day when they set out from the camp. Then it came about when the ark set out that Moses said, "Rise up, O LORD! And let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You." When it came to rest, he said, "Return, O LORD, To the myriad thousands of Israel."***

When the Lord led them from Sinai, they went forward in the order established by the Lord. In the march order of Israel the tribes traveled in four groups of three tribes each. In the center of the march were the Levites with the tabernacle on carts and carrying its holy furnishings on their shoulders. The one exception to

the placement of the furnishings was the ark of the covenant. It did not travel in the center of the march, but occupied the first position at the head of the nation. The Levites assigned to bear the ark upon their shoulders marched ahead in front of everyone. This was ordinarily the opposite of how armies marched into battle in the ancient world.

Usually, the king that led his armies into battle did so from the safety of a placement in the middle of his army or even at the rear. The reason for this was to not make the king, who was most valuable to his army as its leader vulnerable to the danger of the battle. The king would typically surround himself with his army as a protection for himself in battle. Here, the ark of the covenant, which represented the throne of God in symbol was at the head of the army of Israel. The reversal was intentional and telling. The image portrayed by this positioning was that the Lord did not hide His throne behind the armies of Israel but led them from the front. He did not need their protection, but instead, He placed Himself in front of them as their protection. Any enemy and resistance they would encounter on their journey would have to deal first with the throne of God before the army of Israel that followed Him. We are also blessed to always follow the Lord into battle. Wherever He ordains for us to fight and conquer in His name, He goes first leading us with the authority and power of His throne.

As the camp first set out, Moses cried out and established a tradition that accompanied all their future movements. When Moses cried, "Rise up, O Lord! And let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You." it was at once both a battle cry, and a declaration of praise directed to the Lord for the sake of the hearts of all Israel. Wherever the Lord would lead, the anticipation was that the people waiting ahead on their journey were not inclined to step aside for the Lord and His people. Every step forward Israel took following the Lord toward and eventually into the Promised Land was a step of spiritual warfare. In that warfare, the supreme confidence of Moses was that the Lord Himself was rising up to scatter His enemies and cause those who hated Him to flee before Him. Moses had seen the awesome hand of God in warfare against the so-called gods of Egypt. Moses had seen the power of God displayed in the opening of the Red Sea. He knew that as they moved forward, their security was based not upon themselves, but upon Him. Then, each time they camped wherever the pillar of cloud rested, Moses would cry out, "Return, O LORD, To the myriad thousands of Israel." This was a declaration that each place they camped now became their possession because it was His possession. Each place the Lord led them and established His house with the camp of Israel around Him was a renewal of their covenant relationship.

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## Numbers 11

***11:1-3 - "Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the LORD; and when the LORD heard it, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. The people therefore cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the LORD and the fire died out. So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the LORD burned among them."***

It does not take long for the hopeful tone of chapter 10 as Israel sets out on their journey to the Promised Land to turn sour. Soon after leaving their camp of nearly a year at the foot of Mt. Sinai and heading further into the desert wilderness, the nation on the march begin to complain. The reason for the complaint of the people is not detailed for us here, but we can draw a conclusion from the description we are given. They "became like those who complain of adversity." Their complaint arose out of their shared circumstance of adversity. There was no great problem or crisis that caused this complaint. It arose simply out of leaving the comfort of camp and familiar surroundings and having to begin the long and arduous walk to Canaan.

They did not specifically direct their complaint to the Lord. It would have been better if they had by praying through their struggles in direct communication to the Lord. Instead, they complained about their circumstances to one another. Even then, they were not sharing their difficulty with one another to seek help and encouragement to trust the Lord from their fellow Israelites. They were only complaining to give vent to their frustrations and it produced no good fruit in those who heard it. The only thing that can come from such complaining is to stir a similar attitude in others, and undermine their own trust in the Lord.

It was not just their neighbors that heard the complaints. The Lord heard every complaint as well. He did not respond with compassion and concern to their complaints however. Their complaints kindled the Lord's anger like a fire is kindled. The Lord was angry with them because their complaints really targeted more than their difficult circumstances. Their complaints ultimately were aimed at the Lord Who had brought them into this wilderness. He was responsible for them being here, and they did not like it. Their complaints exposed a serious lack of appreciation for all the Lord had done for them, and showed just how deeply self-centered Israel was. In order for God's great redemptive purpose for His chosen nation of Israel to be fulfilled it was necessary for them to pass through the difficulty of the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. Israel was not willing to endure some hardship for God's glorious purpose. This is what kindled the anger of the Lord.

The consequence of the complaints of Israel was that a fire from the Lord burned the outskirts of the camp. This was a judgment from the Lord, but it was also filled with His grace. Rather than the severe judgment they deserved, there was

no loss of life, only a strong warning in the fire that burned the outskirts of the camp of the dangerous nature of their complaints toward Him. Israel should have taken this warning of the burning at Taberah to heart and shut the lid on all temptations to grumble and complain. Tragically, they were not deeply affected by the burning, and shortly after this indulged in an even more serious episode of complaining against the Lord.

***11:4-6 - "The rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, "Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna."***

The rabble mentioned in verse 4 were the people that traveled with Israel out of Egypt. They were not Israelites, but a mixture of some of the slaves that had been freed along with Israel in the Ten Plagues, and probably some of the poorer Egyptians also. The rabble were not spiritually healthy and here are identified as being influenced by greedy desires. Of course, they did not keep their greedy desires a secret, but influenced Israel to share their desires. Israel followed the lead of the rabble, and began to voice their complaint about the daily menu provided by the Lord in the wilderness. For a year now Israel and the rabble had been blessed with a miraculous provision from heaven of manna, six days out of each seven. The manna was provided in a perfect amount to meet the need of every man, woman, and child in the wilderness. It was simple food, which we can safely assume was perfectly nutritious. The people were able to prepare and serve in a number of ways to give some variety to their diet.

None of that was taken into account by the people so blessed to have this bread from heaven on a daily basis. No doubt, the manna was enjoyable at first as a novelty, a new taste, and much needed provision. But, that appreciation for the manna had long since worn thin in the perspective of Israel and the rabble. After a year of eating manna, the people began to reminisce about their former diet. They remembered the greater menu options of their Egyptian diet including fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as the flavorful garlic and onions, and the fish from the Nile river. In their complaint about their diet, they showed a serious absence of spiritual perspective. They remembered those foods of Egypt of having been available to them "free in Egypt." They were correct in a technical sense, but completely wrong in the big picture. Those foods were provided to Israel free of charge in Egypt because they were slaves in Egypt and their Egyptian masters provided those foods for them for "free." This really meant that the foods of Egypt were not free at all, but the provisions of their miserable slavery.

Their hearts should have rejoiced at each day's taste of manna because it was a daily reminder of the miraculous provision of God Who had led them from slavery into freedom. Instead, they quickly forgot the misery of their former slavery and could only remember the meals they ate at the beginning and end of long hard

days of slave labor. When they were slaves, they cried out in torment to the Lord to deliver them. Now that He had answered their cry in His compassion and was feeding them daily the bread of freedom, they could only complain about losing their slave's diet. For those who have been saved in the New Covenant by the power and grace of God, learn from the fleshly short-sighted perspective of these complaining Israelites, and be eternally grateful for the provision of the Lord in your new life. There is nothing you enjoyed in your old life before salvation that you should miss to complain about.

***11:10-17 - "Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, each man at the doorway of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly, and Moses was displeased. So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You been so hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all this people on me? Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which You swore to their fathers'? "Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, 'Give us meat that we may eat!' "I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness." The LORD therefore said to Moses, "Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. Then I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you will not bear it all alone."***

There is a strong statement in this account of the influence of murmuring and complaining on the hearts of others, even the hearts of leaders. Moses was not oblivious to the complaints of the people about their diet of manna. Even though the complaints were not really directed at him, but the Lord, Moses was himself impacted by them. He was weighed down by the poor attitudes of the people and even though he began to struggle with his own attitude, he did the right thing by not voicing his complaint to the people or even his fellow leaders, but to the Lord. Moses approaches the Lord in his struggles, and while he is not a model of immovable faith here, he does cry out to the Lord expects to find the resolution to his problem with the Lord.

Moses is not unmoved by the growing dissatisfaction of the people. He cries to the Lord with an inappropriate complaint of his own. "Why have you been so hard on Your servant, and why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all this people on me?" The exasperation of Moses with the people is understandable given their selfish, short-sighted complaints, but his frustration with the Lord is misplaced. First, was it true that the Lord had been so hard on

him by appointing him to lead Israel? No, it was indeed a hard assignment, but the Lord had not been so hard on him. So hard implies an unfair assignment. Remember this if you are ever in a place of struggling with the Lord's assignment for you in His kingdom service. The Lord's most important assignments are hard because so much is at stake and there will always be spiritual opposition to the will of God. Yet, the Lord has never been, or ever will be so hard on His servants to give them unfair tasks.

Moses may have begun his prayer in a complaint mode from the influence of the attitudes of the people, but the real concern of his prayer was a legitimate issue that the Lord received without rebuke and answered immediately with a change in Israel's leadership that would lighten the load on Moses somewhat. Moses pointed out the burden of the nation upon him. No man, other than the Lord Jesus, is capable of carrying the burden of spiritual leadership of God's people without help. The Lord responded to the cry of Moses by implementing a greater degree of shared leadership over Israel. Seventy elders of the nation were marked out (possibly the same seventy that had earlier gone with Moses part way up Sinai and had eaten in the presence of the Lord's glory), in order to share a greater measure of the responsibilities that Moses carried. This was not simply a human appointment to greater leadership, but the Lord would equip these seventy men to function in part as Moses himself. The Lord did so by granting these seventy elders a measure of the Spirit of God that was upon Moses. This confirms for us that Moses was no superman, but was special in ministry because of a special measure of the Spirit upon him. A unique aspect of the Spirit's ministry is also revealed here that applies to our own experience in the New Covenant. The Lord took from the Spirit upon Moses and put the Spirit upon these men. In natural terms we would expect the Spirit upon Moses to now be less or diminished. However, the Spirit is not a thing, or substance of a limited amount. The Spirit of God is as infinite as God Himself. The Spirit's influence upon Moses was just as strong after this as before, while He also now extended His influence in a more powerful way upon these seventy elders.

**11:18-20, 31-34 - "Say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, "Oh that someone would give us meat to eat! For we were well-off in Egypt." Therefore the LORD will give you meat and you shall eat. 'You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you; because you have rejected the LORD who is among you and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"' ... "Now there went forth a wind from the LORD and it brought quail from the sea, and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp and about two cubits deep on the surface of the ground. The people spent all day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers) and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very severe plague. So the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had been greedy."**

As the people continued their complaints about their diet, the Lord decided to respond. His response is very interesting and holds as we should expect a serious lesson for us. After a certain amount of complaining about the manna and the lack of the foods of Egypt, the Lord decided to give the people what they were whining about. He announced to them that He was going to provide meat for their diet. But, the provision came with a clear note of displeasure. It was not that the Lord considered their complaint and decided that maybe the people were right after all and that He had been too miserly in His provision of food for them. The new provision of meat was not a gracious provision from the Lord, but His discipline for them in tangible form. Before the meat arrived, the Lord warned Israel through Moses. The Lord was going to provide, not just a day's measure of meat, or a week, but a full month's amount. Moses clued the people in to what this meat would mean when he declared that they would eat it until it came out of their nostrils and they came to loath it. Moses also identified the real issue behind their food complaints. Their complaint was really a rejection of the Lord and His salvation from Egypt.

In spite of this powerful word of rebuke from Moses, the people were thrilled when a wind brought so many quail surrounding their camp that each person that went out to gather the quail to eat gathered at least ten homers full (the equivalent of about 60 bushels full). After they gathered the quail and began their feast, suddenly things turned from glee at their good fortune to great sorrow. As soon as they began to eat, the Lord judged the people with a very severe plague. Many of those who were most greedy died in that place. Their grave sites became a permanent warning to all future generations of Israel. The place was named the Graves of Craving. The costly lesson is that those who crave what the

Lord has not ordained for their lives may be given what they craved, but the end result is only death. No good thing can come from disregarding what the Lord has provided and lusting for that which the Lord has not.

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## Numbers 12

***12:1-3 - "Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); and they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" And the LORD heard it. (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)"***

In chapter 11, just prior to this incident, there was a costly lesson for the entire nation at the Graves of Craving when the Lord taught all of Israel about His disdain for grumbling and complaining among the people of His holy nation. Yet, in the next recorded incident following the judgment of the Lord upon the grumbling nation we see here that two of the core leaders of the nation have not learned the lesson of the Lord. That these particular leaders spoke against Moses in this way must have been a great test for his heart. Miriam and Aaron were not just important leaders in Israel, they were the natural sister and brother of Moses. He might have expected others to speak against his leadership, but he most likely did not expect those of his own family to speak against him.

We are not told in detail how this unhealthy and destructive conversation started between Miriam and Aaron, but we can be sure, that like all conversations, this one started with one of them raising the issue to the other. Whoever started the conversation will bear the greater responsibility for it, but that does not mean that the one who first listened was without sin. The one who chose to initiate an inappropriate conversation aimed at undermining the leadership of Moses was wrong to do so, but the one who first listened without confronting the other and then joining in would bear their own responsibility. We can conclude with probably certainty that this conversation began with Miriam. The two clues that it was her that started the conversation are that she is the one singled out by the Lord for judgment from this, and her name is mentioned before Aaron's in verse one, indicating that it was her that first spoke against Moses, with Aaron being drawn into speaking against him through her.

There were two issues with Moses that they discussed. The first issue is what is commonly called a smokescreen. In this context a smokescreen is an issue that does not address the real concern, but is used to cover the real issue in a way that obscures that the person that raised it is doing something wrong. The smokescreen issue was the wife of Moses. They did not like that Moses had married a Cushite woman. Nothing in this passage or others identifies for us

exactly why they would have been bothered with him marrying a Cushite woman, but the best explanation is that she was not an Israelite woman. In other words, they were criticizing Moses to each other for having gone outside the covenant people to marry. In the story of that time period of the life of Moses, there is no indication from the Lord that Moses was sinning by marrying her. His life circumstances had taken him out of Egypt where all of the Israelites lived, to forty years in Midian where he married the daughter of Jethro the Midianite. The complaint of Miriam and Aaron presumed an issue of sin with that the Lord had not raised. However, the real heart of the complaint of Miriam and Aaron was not the marriage of Moses but the special calling of Moses.

Both Miriam and Aaron were more bothered by a distinction in leadership perception of Moses. Their statement, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" was in essence an accusation that Moses had made himself superior to them in the leadership of the nation and that they were not being given the honor due to them because Moses was withholding it from them. The brief description of the character of Moses that the Lord included at the end of verse three is provided to reveal the true heart attitude of Moses against his accuser's characterization. The only possible explanation if Moses were presenting himself to Israel as the only messenger of the Lord and intentionally pushing Miriam and Aaron into the background would be if Moses was motivated by a heart of pride. The Lord showed that Moses was a truly humble man, rather than a proud man. He had not chosen to become the prophet of God. He had not called himself into this special role. If anything, we saw in the encounter with the Lord at the burning bush that Moses was a reluctant leader who only took the role at God's insistence. For God to identify Moses as more humble than any man on earth, of course, included the comparison to Miriam and Aaron. Their complaint was born out of hearts of pride, as most grumbling about spiritual leadership tends to be.

The key phrase in this passage is simple, but critical in its implications. "And the LORD heard it." The Lord heard conversation between Miriam and Aaron. They were not specifically praying. They had not approached the tabernacle to have this conversation. Most likely they had the conversation in private where no one else could hear them. The point is that the Lord is always listening, and paying close attention when the leadership He has appointed is the subject. They should have considered the third person present in the conversation (the Lord) before opening their mouth.

***12:4-9 - "Suddenly the LORD said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, "You three come out to the tent of meeting." So the three of them came out. Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward, He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. "Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses?" So the anger of the LORD burned against them and He departed."***

Up until this point there remained a possibility that Moses was the one wrongly withholding leadership honor from Miriam and Aaron, and that they were right to raise a complaint about him. The Lord made sure that His perspective was clearly understood in this issue they had with Moses. Often, when there are controversial issues in a leadership circumstance, the necessary thing to do is call for a meeting of the leaders. There was a meeting called, but it was not called by Moses, or by Miriam and Aaron. This meeting was called by the Lord. The Lord called all three who were involved to the tent of meeting and then He chose to appear in the form of the pillar of cloud. The Lord wanted all of them to recognize without question that He was personally involved in this meeting. Next, the Lord addressed, not Moses, with whom they had complaints, but Miriam and Aaron who had raised the complaints.

When they stepped forward at the command of the Lord, the Lord addressed the real issue with which they were struggling. The Lord did not bring up the smokescreen issue of the wife of Moses. That was not even a consideration in this meeting. Instead the Lord addressed the calling of Moses with a clear comparison of how the Lord had chosen to speak with Moses in contrast of how He would speak to other prophets who would be called to be His messengers. The Lord emphasized that He had given a special privilege to Moses unlike any other prophet. Moses enjoyed a mouth to mouth, face to face relationship with the Lord. Other prophets would receive their communications from the Lord in dreams and visions, but the Lord had invited Moses into the cloud of His glory on Sinai and had revealed more of Himself to Moses than any man in history. In this special relationship, Moses represented the unique relationship Jesus would have with God the Father as His only begotten Son. The Lord fully expected Miriam and Aaron to respect that special status the Lord had granted to Moses. The Lord rebuked them for not having a holy fear of speaking against the Lord's special messenger as they had done. The Lord did not speak this to them in a soft gentle reproof. His anger burned against both of them and He suddenly left the meeting He had called with His last communication to them being this angry rebuke. The response of the Lord to the sin of Miriam and Aaron here shows us that the leaders of God's people are not exempt from the necessary holy fear of respecting the calling and assignments of others in leadership.



***12:10-15 - "But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was leprous. Then Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord, I beg you, do not account this sin to us, in which we have acted foolishly and in which we have sinned. Oh, do not let her be like one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes from his mother's womb!" Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "O God, heal her, I pray!" But the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut up for seven days outside the camp, and afterward she may be received again." So Miriam was shut up outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until Miriam was received again."***

How serious was the transgression of Miriam? As soon as the cloud of the Lord's presence withdrew from them, Miriam was white with a leprous condition. This was not a natural development. The Lord caused this to happen to her as His judgment. It was similar to what the Lord had briefly done to the hand of Moses at the burning bush to provide a miraculous demonstration for Pharaoh's court.

"The LORD furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign." (Exodus 4:6-8). Miriam was inflicted with this condition to show her and anyone that saw her the true nature of complaining against the leadership the Lord had appointed.

At the same time, there was mercy and grace of God for her in this development. God did not end her life for what she did, but instead gave her a startling lesson that would last her the rest of her life. The lesson was immediately grasped by Aaron. As soon as he saw the consequence of their shared sin in her flesh, Aaron had a strong change of heart about his actions and cried out in repentance for their sin. He also appealed to Moses to intercede on her behalf with the Lord. The humility of Moses was again demonstrated in him not defending himself, or taking advantage of this situation to rub her misery into their faces. Moses simply did what Aaron had asked of him and cried out to the Lord on behalf of his sister. His prayer was not for God to teach her a lesson, but for God to heal her.

The Lord did intend to graciously heal Miriam, but He first wanted her to deeply grasp the enormity of her transgression. The Lord compared her circumstance to a public shame of a father spitting in the face of a daughter. This would only happen under the most extreme circumstances of the daughter shaming the father by her public behavior (Deuteronomy 25:9). In such a case, the daughter that had been scorned in public by her father through spitting would be rendered ceremonially unclean by his spit for seven days. The Lord commanded that

Miriam be excluded from the camp of Israel for seven days. This was not petty revenge, but designed to impact Miriam's heart through this seven day exclusion from the camp. When we are disciplined by the Lord, it is never pleasant or easy to endure, but His discipline teaches heart lessons that last far beyond the sin that brought the discipline.

### **Questions from Numbers 11:**

**Question:** In Numbers 11:18-20 - Does this passage have to do with gluttony?

**Answer:** No, I don't believe this passage is written to warn us about gluttony in particular. Gluttony has to do with eating too much. The issue for Israel was not that they were eating too much, but that they were complaining about the food that the Lord had provided for them and constantly craving other foods that the Lord had not given them to eat in the wilderness.

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### **Numbers 13**

***13:1-3 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, "Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, every one a leader among them." So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran at the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the sons of Israel."***

As this chapter opens, Israel has traveled from Sinai all the way through the wilderness to an area of Paran, close to the border of the Promised Land. Rather than leading them directly into the Promised Land, the Lord has Israel camp in Paran and first scout ahead. Moses was to send a group of twelve leaders ahead into the land. Each of the twelve tribes would be represented by one leader. The men were to spy out the land of Canaan starting in the south nearest to the camp of Israel and working their way north. They were to evaluate the people of the land; their numbers, their relative military strength, and whether their cities were fortified. They were also to evaluate the land itself and determine whether it was a fruitful and pleasant land.

The purpose of their scouting the land was not to help Israel decide whether to enter the land with the intention of conquering it. That plan for Israel to enter the land and possess it while driving out the current inhabitants was long ago determined and declared by the Lord. As far back as the time of Abraham, the Lord had told him that his descendants would return to this land and take possession of it. "Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." (Genesis 15:16). This reconnaissance of Canaan served two purposes in God's plan. The first purpose would give Israel

an accurate picture of what was ahead of them, both confirming the descriptions the Lord had given and preparing their hearts for the battle ahead. The second purpose was at this moment hidden from Israel, but known to the Lord. Sending these scouts ahead to bring back their report of the land and its inhabitants would reveal the hearts of all of Israel and show whether they were trusting the Lord and ready to obey His commands, or whether they were leaning more on their natural perspectives.

Even in the way the Lord gave this command to Moses to send out the twelve spies, Israel should have been strengthened and encouraged for what lay ahead. The Lord did not tell Moses to send the spies out to determine whether Israel would be able to conquer the land. There was no hint of needing this report of the spies to base a final decision of crossing into Canaan. Instead, the Lord affirmed to Moses and all Israel through him that they should spy out the land "which I am going to give to the sons of Israel." The Lord says once again here that He is going to give the land of Canaan to Israel. This is the promise of God. If the Lord says He is going to give the land, then the issue is not whether He will do what He promised, but whether they will believe what He promised. The Lord does not qualify His promise here. He does not say that He might give them the land, or that He will try to give them the land, but simply that He is going to give it to them. As the story unfolds we will see that the Lord was faithful to His promise and He did give them the land of Canaan. We will also see however, that those who refused to believe what the Lord had promised did not personally ever enjoy what He had promised to the nation.

***13:27-31 - "Thus they told him, and said, "We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan." Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it." But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us."***

The twelve scouts returned from their assignment. They had traveled throughout the land for forty days. They brought back to camp with them some of the fruit of the land as a proof of the Lord's assurance that it was a land of abundance. This was the fulfillment of an earlier promise the Lord had made to Israel when He first sent Moses to Egypt to deliver Israel from slavery. "So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey." (Exodus 3:17). Now, with this report of the twelve spies all the nation knew that the Lord had done exactly what He had promised. Their hearts

should have been encouraged and strengthened to trust the Lord for their next step. Their perspective should have been this; since the Lord had been faithful and powerful to deliver them from Egypt as He said, and carry them through the wilderness as He said, and that Canaan was a land of milk and honey as He said, that He would give them the land as He said.

However, the people of the nation did not respond to the report of the twelve scouts with a heart of courage and faith. The people knew better and should have trusted the Lord no matter what report the twelve scouts brought back, but they were already weak in faith due to the debilitating effect of their own grumblings of the previous chapters. Their own grumblings left them vulnerable to the impact of the report of the scouts. The report started well. All the scouts confirmed that the land certainly was a land of milk and honey. As a side point, this description of the land was not intended or to be taken literally. There were not literal rivers of milk and honey in Canaan, but the phrase was descriptive of the nourishing sweetness of a fertile land. The scouts showed the fruit they had carried back to camp as clear proof of the abundance of the land. There was only one problem in the eyes of ten of the twelve scouts.

The scouts' report turned in a negative direction when they began to describe the cities of the land and its inhabitants. The cities were identified as very large and fortified. The people were described as strong, and that even the descendants of Anak were seen (a special challenge). The tone of this part of the report was one of hopeless discouragement. These scouts had determined from what they had seen that the land was going to be too difficult for them to conquer. Not all of the scouts agreed with this assessment though. There were two notable exceptions. Caleb and Joshua saw the same land, cities and inhabitants as the other ten scouts and drew a completely different conclusion from their observations.

Most likely the twelve scouts had discussed and debated their perspectives on the forty days of their journey, and now when the ten scouts gave their discouraging report, one of them spoke up in an attempt to counteract the negative impact with a strong statement of faith. Caleb "quieted the people" which implies that all of the people were already beginning to at least murmur from the report of the ten scouts. Then Caleb urged everyone that they should without question go up and take the land. He declared with conviction that they would surely accomplish the conquest of the land. This was no empty statement of Caleb whistling in the dark to try and put on a brave face. He really believed in his heart that they should go forward because the Lord had brought them here for this very purpose. His confidence in the Lord far outweighed any concern about the difficulties ahead.

The other scouts, with the exception of Joshua, did not share his courage or his faith. When Caleb encouraged the nation to move forward, the other ten spies immediately contradicted him and asserted that Israel would not be able to successfully conquer the land because the people of the land were too strong.

Their response revealed that they were not even considering the Lord and His role in all of this. They had already forgotten the implications of the ten plagues in Egypt. They had forgotten the implications of the divided Red Sea, the manna in the wilderness, and the glory of God on Sinai. The horizontal evidence of what they had seen with their natural eyes was blinding the vertical evidence of true spiritual faith in the One that had brought them this far.

***13:32-33 - "So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."***

The report of the ten scouts is now identified as a "bad report of the land." Their report was not bad due to inaccuracies of facts. They accurately reported the nature of the land, the strength of the cities and the inhabitants. What made their report bad was the conclusion they drew from the facts which they observed. They knew that the Lord had brought them all the way from Egypt to possess this exact land. Who were they to conclude that they could not do so? Their report dishonored the Lord, denied His promise, and discouraged the hearts of His people.

In order to emphasize their fear about conquering the land, they described the inhabitants as giants in comparison to themselves. They saw themselves as grasshoppers to be stepped on by the sons of Anak. Some Bible commentators believe that the spies were merely making up a story at this point and grossly exaggerating the truth for impact. I don't believe that this was a gross exaggeration, or else Caleb and Joshua would have disputed the facts of their report since they had seen the same things. Caleb and Joshua do not argue about what they saw in the land, only what it meant and what they should do. The Nephilim are mentioned at this point by the spies. This is a detail that may have pushed the hearts of the nation over the edge into a fearful shrinking back. The Nephilim were the mysterious people from ancient history back before the Flood.

"The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown." (Genesis 6:4). Though there is disagreement among Bible teachers in identifying the Nephilim, from my studies in the Bible, church history, and ancient world legends, I am convinced that the Nephilim were a giant and mighty people that were the offspring of the mating of fallen angels and human women. The key verse in Genesis 6:4 identifies that the Nephilim were a problem both before and after the Flood. Rather than develop the details of this issue again here I'll refer you to my explanation on Day 6 of this study covering Genesis chapter 6.

## **Questions from Numbers 12:**

**Question:** What IS the right way to handle some sort of perceived weakness or sin within the leadership....or should a person only pray and trust the Lord who sees men's hearts?

**Answer:** It really depends on the nature of the concern. If you believe a leader in the church or Christian ministry is in sin, yes, of course you should pray for them, but your knowledge of their sin would make you responsible to do more than pray. I would pray first, and then approach that leader in private to express my concern about them and the sin they have fallen into. Their response in that situation would determine what more, if anything you should do. If the sinning leader responds with a humble, repentant attitude and takes the necessary steps to stop sinning and make themselves accountable to other leaders then your responsibility may end there. If the leader shows an unwillingness to acknowledge or deal with their sin, then I would seek out another leader in that church to go with you in a second attempt to confront the first leader. After that, the responsibility shifts to the second leader to determine what is to be done depending on how the leader responds.

I am not sure without an example what you mean by a "perceived weakness" in the leader. However, if the issue does not involve sin, but simply a concern about the leader then the right thing to do would be to pray first, and then go to that leader to share your concerns. It would be inappropriate to talk to others either before or after sharing your concern with the leader, unless you are seeking counsel from another leader about how to handle your concern. Gossip, however, is never appropriate in such cases. If the leader receives your concern, then it was well worth the effort. If the leader does not seem to receive your concerns, then your next step is to continue in prayer for them that the Lord will open their eyes to see what you believe they are missing.