

Numbers 11-12 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

As we come to ch. 11, the people have set out from Mt. Sinai to resume their journey to Canaan.

Having been delivered from bondage in Egypt, they needed to learn what it meant to be the people of God, so they spent an entire year at Sinai -

• Receiving the Law

• Building the tabernacle

• And being organized into an ordered arrangement of their camp and in their march.

Now that all that is done, it's time to resume their trek to the Promised Land.

So ch. 10 ends with them making a three day journey from Sinai into the Wilderness of Paran.

Outline

I. FIRST CENSUS & ORDERING THE CAMP OF ISRAEL CHS. 1-9:14

II. THE JOURNEY TO CANAAN BEGINS Chs. 9:15-10:36

III. TROUBLES ALONG THE WAY Chs. 11-12

A. *Complaining – Part 1 11:1-15*

¹Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.

²Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched. ³So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the LORD had burned among them.

What were they complaining about? It's not said. And it's not stated *why* they complained because *that's the whole point*.

There wasn't some major trial or trouble they were facing.

They were simply stuck in a place of having a bad attitude, a dissatisfied heart.

Look at how simply it's stated . . .

When the people complained, → it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it.

Why did their complaint displease God?

Because the evidences of His goodness were all around them!

He was above them in the cloud that protected them from the burning rays of the desert sun.

At night, He was above them as a cloud of fire lighting the camp.

Every morning they enjoyed manna.

They were now a free people, no longer feeling the bite of the Egyptian lash.

How could they complain when God had proven Himself so mighty on their behalf in the Plagues, the Exodus, & the crossing of the Red Sea?

Their complaint showed a *lack of gratitude* for the *past* goodness of God and a *lack of faith* for what God would do for them *today and tomorrow*.

When the people complained, → it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it.

God hears our whining & complaining, and it *displeases* Him.

Many parents have experienced this displeasure with their own children when they complain.

We live in such incredible affluence in this nation.

We provide our children with a nice home, clothes, food, a bed.

And they complain because they're bored, or while standing in front of a closet full of clothes and shoes they say, "I've got nothing to wear."

A plate full of food that mom has just spent an hour preparing and dad has worked hard to provide sits on the table before them and they wrinkle their nose and say it is yucky.

A few weeks ago I was standing in line at the store and watching a mother with her two young children a couple positions ahead of me in line.

The cart was full of kids clothes, toys, and junk food.

But the older little boy, maybe 6, was showing his mother a roll of candy he wanted.

She said no, and he threw a fit.

It was a battle for a while but finally mom gave in.

Then, when the little boy wasn't looking, she reached into the cart and took out one of the toys and set it aside.

How often are we like that little boy?

God has filled our lives with so much and has always been faithful to provide for and take care of us.

Yet we complain when we don't get our way or when things are a bit tough.

I wonder how often we throw our little spiritual fit and demand God give us what we want, and He does just to teach us that we ought not dictate to God what is best.

And what do we miss out on because in demanding my way, I've just short-circuited God's best?

It is so very easy to slip into an attitude of complaint. We must stay on guard against it!

The people of Israel needed to learn that an attitude of complaint against God is *incompatible* with what it means to be His people.

Faith and complaint are mutually exclusive, so He brought judgment to the *edges* of the camp in the form of fire.

The fire of God which had been such a comfort to them at night and in defending them against the armies of Egypt at the Red Sea, now licked the fringes of the camp.

They needed to realize that God's presence is a *comfort* when they were walking in faith but a *danger* when walking in unbelief.

It's interesting that the judgment was visited at the *fringe* of the camp.

Why there? In v. 4 we read of "the mixed multitude" who was a part of the nation.

These weren't Jews, but were other nationalities who'd managed to make good their escape from slavery in Egypt when the children of Israel went out.

There were some destitute Egyptians as well who figured they would fare better with Israel than to stay in Egypt where the system was against them.

This mixed multitude would not be staying in the main body of the camp of Israel among the tribes. They would arrange their tents along the edges.

That is where the fire burned because that is where the complaint was most

heated.

When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed and God ended the judgment.

Why didn't the people cry out to God themselves?

This is a sign they had no relationship with Him.

The God of Israel was simply a powerful deity to them, not someone with whom they *had* or *wanted* a personal relationship.

They had no ground to talk to God because He wasn't THEIR God.

The best they could do was to go to someone they knew *had* a relationship with Him – Moses.

The very people who scoff at your faith in God at work and school when things are fine, will come to you one day when they're in trouble and ask for you to pray for them.

Use that moment to tell them they can pray to God themselves but that such prayers begin with a personal recognition of their need of Christ.

Moses named the place where this judgment was poured out, Taberah = *Burning*.

4Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? 5We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"

We read here in v. 4 of the "mixed multitude." This is the only time this word is used in the OT and is literally "rabble."

In other places this group is described by a word which means "mixed multitude" [Exodus 12:38 - 'ereb].

Moses gives them this description because he wants to show that they were not an official part of the camp of Israel.

They were just *rabble*, spiritual riff-raff, hanging out along the fringes, causing trouble, stirring up strife, poisoning the hearts & minds of the people of God with their wayward habits and lustful desires.

They grew tired of the daily manna, even though it was miracle bread.

They grew *accustomed* to the *miracle*!

And when they lost the sense of wonder and thankfulness for it, they began to long for the old foods they ate when they were slaves and outcasts in Egypt.

Yummy fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, garlic!

Of course, what they got was the dinky and spoiled leftovers after the Egyptians had taken the best.

But that didn't matter – they craved the tastes of yesterday.

What a pitiful picture this is of what happens to so many of those who make a start toward freedom in Christ, but then fall away.

They get all excited because they attend some big event like a crusade or concert and hear the gospel and think – "Hey, this is pretty cool. I didn't know Christians could have fun and that there were so many of them."

Or they see the power of God revealed in a healing or in some dramatic answer to prayer and they are confronted with the reality of God and realize they ought to pay more attention.

Like the rabble of the mixed multitude, they take a first few steps into *religion*.

But once they've been at the foot of Sinai for a while and realized that having God as their *Heavenly Father* means being His *holy child*, and a life of spiritual discipline – they start to long for the stuff that marked their past - the parties, the thrills, the sin.

Even though God is sustaining them with mercy and grace and wonderful spiritual bread and living water, they begin to *crave* the old days, so they compromise with the world and bring their pursuit of spiritual things to a halt. They try to camp out somewhere between the Egypt of the World and the Promised Land of the Spirit-filled life.

But that's a dry wilderness that causes them to whine and complain.

They end up poisoning the environment around them with their complaining, compromised lifestyle.

And soon, even those sincere Christians they are around can be influenced by their example – as happened here in v. 4.

The children of Israel picked up the complaint of the rabble and became unhappy with the daily provision of manna, longing for the food of Egypt.

Notice what they said, "Who will give us meat to eat?"

Who indeed? Why didn't they ask God to provide?

They had flocks and herds. If they were so hungry for meat, why not barbeque a little tri-tip?

Here's the danger of getting into the *habit* of complaining – you don't really do anything to make it better. You think it's your job to point out what's wrong.

Whenever my children have said, "I'm bored." My response is, "And whose problem is that?"

In effect, this is what the Israelites said – "There is nothing at all except this manna. We're bored with it!"

Moses then gives a description of what the manna was like so we can see how incredibly foolish their complaint was.

⁷Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium. [pearl white] ⁸The people went about and gathered it, ground it on millstones or beat it in the mortar, cooked it in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil.

⁹And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it.

In Ex. 16:31 the manna is described as tasting like wafers made with honey.

So critics pile on here and say that this is a contradiction because v. 8 says that it tasted like pastry made with oil.

Which was it? Depends on how it was prepared.

Moses says here there were different ways the people prepared it.

One way it tasted like baklava, another it tasted like a donut.

As the food God provided for them, it had all the nutrients needed to sustain them in their journeys, and yet it was delicious.

But the rabble grew bored with it. Their complaints poisoned the spirit of the children of Israel until they were all moaning about how hard life was under God.

¹⁰Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased. ¹¹So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor

in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me?
¹²Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers? ¹³Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' ¹⁴I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden *is* too heavy for me. ¹⁵If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!"

Moses adds his complaint to the people's.

The task of leadership has become too great for him.

He knows the children of Israel ought to be showing more faith in God and he's feeling upset with them and overwhelmed with the task of not only providing for them but helping them overcome their unbelief.

Leadership of the people of God is a great privilege, maybe the greatest earthly honor that can be given to a human being.

[President vs. Pastor]

But as great as that honor is, there are also times of great disappointment.

We can sympathize with Moses here; he knew the people ought to be walking in faith, confident God would provide and rejoicing in His presence.

There was simply no *reason* for their whining.

When a shepherd of God's flock watches people he's poured his life into walk away from the Lord, walk out on their marriage, become alcoholics, shack up with their boy or girl friend, and go off into a lifestyle of complete moral abandonment, ending up on the street or in prison, it's gut wrenching.

You wonder sometimes how much you can take and if maybe you're a failure because they stray.

A better pastor would have known what to do or say that would have kept them safe.

Moses was overwhelmed and saw no way out but death.

The complaint of the godless rabble first infected the children of Israel, the people of God, and eventually found it's way to the top; even Moses is complaining now!

He's lost sight of God's promise to bring them to the Promised land.

Look at his words –

V. 11 – “Why have I not found favor in Your sight?”

Do you ever say, “Lord, if you love me, why have You brought all this on me?”

God's response is always the same: “It's precisely because of My love that I have allowed this for it is training you to trust in Me.”

God had not “Afflicted” Moses with the “burden of all these people” as he charges in v. 11.

To be frank, God had called him *simply to lead* them and Moses had *neglected* a crucial element of leadership among a group so large – Delegation!

God would use even the failure of the people here to good effect in helping

Moses see his need.

See it he finally does in v. 14 when he says, “**I am not able to bear all these people alone.**”

Bingo! Now Moses has a right *understanding* of the situation.

And though he has the right understanding, he still has a wrong attitude.

In v. 15, Moses kind of ‘*goes off the deep end.*’

“I can’t take this anymore, and if this is the way it’s going to be, if You care about me at all then kill me right now!”

Is Moses being suicidal?

If so, then he takes such thoughts where they need to be taken – to the Lord.

Our lives are in God’s hands and if it’s time for us to go, then let it be by His doing not our own.

Suicide is murder, murder of one’s self! It’s a grievous sin.

Yet most people will know the temptation to end their lives at some point or another.

What do we do when such thoughts rise up? Take them to the Lord and leave them there.

V. 15 ends with Moses saying, “**Do not let me see my wretchedness!**”

What he means is – if I’ve failed at being a leader and the nation is going to fall apart, rather than seeing my failure, kill me so I can die with my pride somewhat intact.

This is not a prayer that God will answer! He is not in the business of salvaging our pride.

On the contrary, He wants to expose it and see it slain.

Showing Moses his utter dependence on God and that he could do nothing without Him was the way to bless and restore him.

We cannot be truly used by the Lord until we come to grips with the truth that left to ourselves we are wretched and miserable.

As Paul said: God’s strength is made complete in my weakness. [2 Cor. 12:9] [\[1\]](#)

B. Overworked Moses Gets Help 11:16-30

¹⁶So the LORD said to Moses: “Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. ¹⁷Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put *the same* upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear *it* yourself alone.

God’s remedy for Moses’ feeling overburdened is *delegation*; to bring him skilled assistants who will help in leading the people.

Part of the problem with the complainers is that the leadership of the nation was too distant.

They needed someone closer who could keep an eye on things and deal with them before they turned into major troubles.

God told Moses to select 70 of the nation’s elders, men who were already functioning in a leadership capacity, and to bring them before the tabernacle.

He would then place a measure of Moses’ mantle of leadership upon each of them.

This is an important insight into how God wants His people led.

These elders already were functioning as leaders.

They had natural ability to lead – but that natural ability had to be anointed and empowered by God if they were to lead God’s people to the place God was directing them.

In the work of ministry, natural ability is not enough – there needs to be *spiritual anointing*.

Seminary does not make pastors for God’s flock.

It may produce teachers. It can hone natural abilities to lead and speak and teach. It can impart great tools to dissect scripture and present a well crafted sermon or provide a model on how to run a tight ministry ship – but no class imparts anointing.

God does this and He does it *sovereignly*. No one puts God under an obligation to anoint them by earning a Masters of Divinity or a Doctorate of Ministry.

This 70 were to return to their place and provide godly leadership throughout the camp, taking care of problems before they developed into bigger deals.

18 Then you shall say to the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, “Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt.” Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat.

As I said earlier, the people could easily have butchered a few of their own flocks and herds if they had been thinking right.

No where was there any prohibition of doing so.

But their complaint was against God and called into question His faithfulness and power.

So God determined to answer their complaint and unbelief in a dramatic way – He would give them meat aplenty.

19 You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, 20 but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the LORD who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, “Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?””

God is going to give them so much meat they will gorge themselves in their lust for it until they hurl and it comes out their noses!

God wanted to confront them with the fact that it wasn’t a lack of food that was the problem – it was the emptiness of their hearts!

What better way to prove that than to deluge them with a tidal wave of meat!

You see, they had practiced a *selective memory* - forgetting the harshness and pain of bondage in Egypt and only remembered the tasty foods they’d enjoyed.

They got stuck on the silly idea that if they could just have meat, they’d be satisfied.

They needed to realize that all the meat in the world would not bring them peace. How often to people think, “If I just had a boyfriend, I’d be happy.”

♣ girlfriend

♣ married

♣ money

♣ car

♣ house

♠ vacation

♠ an MP3 player with 128 MB RAM

They get it, and it does satisfy, for a while. Then, "If I just had a different boyfriend."

♣ girlfriend

♠ single again!

♠ more money

♠ better car

♠ bigger house in a better neighborhood.

♠ longer vacation

♠ an MP3 player 1.5 GB & USB 2.0

When John D. Rockefeller was the richest man in the world, someone asked him how much money was *enough*. He replied, "Just a little bit more."

God was out to show Israel that a *little bit more* is never enough.

Only He can satisfy us – and He doesn't satisfy us with gifts and goodies but Himself!

21 And Moses said, "The people whom I am among are six hundred thousand men on foot; yet You have said, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month.' 22 Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?"

Moses staggered at what God said He would do. It was beyond his imagination.

Even if all the flocks and herds they'd brought out of Egypt were slaughtered or God emptied the Mediterranean Sea, it wouldn't be enough!

Moses is exaggerating to make a point. They are in the wilderness, a land that doesn't have much wildlife.

Where is that much meat going to come from.

He tried to *figure out* how God would perform His promise.

We do this don't we? God has given many promises of protection and provision and we try to figure out how He is going to work and then see if maybe there is something we can do to help.

I think I have learned to stop trying to figure out how God is going to work.

For years I would ponder how and discovered that each time I figured out *how*

God was going to do it, I was really just shutting another door on Him because He NEVER came through the way I had figured out.

I came to realize He probably couldn't do it the way I had figured it out because then I could say that it was my genius that had done it.

So I stopped trying to figure out **HOW** God would work and instead waited patiently for Him to work.

23 And the LORD said to Moses, "Has the LORD'S arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not."

I love God's reply! "Moses – I am the same God who struck Egypt with 10 miraculous plagues!"

"I'm the One Who split the Red Sea so you could go through."

"You think whipping up a month's supply of shish kabobs is going to be a

challenge for ME?”

24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD, and he gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle. **25** Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed *the same* upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again.

God demonstrated to the people that the 70 elders were now His agents by filling their mouths with His words.

This was the only time they prophesied like this, but it was the seal of their ordination to help lead the nation.

26 But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they were among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp.

For some reason that is not made clear, 2 of the 70 had not made it to the tabernacle for the ordination ceremony.

But God knew where they were and put His Spirit on them as well.

He wanted the people to realize that these 70 weren't just political cronies of Moses but that they were men who were divinely appointed to their task as leaders.

27 And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” **28** So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, *one of his choice men*, answered and said, “Moses my lord, forbid them!”

29 Then Moses said to him, “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD'S people were prophets *and* that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!” **30** And Moses returned to the camp, he and the elders of Israel.

Joshua, a guy who will play a huge role later, is young at this point and not aware of how the Lord works.

When the report about Eldad and Medad comes to Moses, his assistant Joshua, jealous on behalf of Moses' leadership, encourages him to send out an official rebuke!

Who do these upstarts think they are?

Joshua was zealous & right in his role as assistant to Moses.

It as his job to assist Moses and do what he could to make sure Moses' leadership wasn't challenged.

He was concerned about the divisions in the camp that could arise if Eldad and Medad began to deviate from Moses' direction.

Moses calmed Joshua and said that he was not *ambitious* for his position as leader.

God appointed him to it and could remove him any time He wanted.

Rather than forbidding people from prophesying, Moses says he wished *everyone* was as anointed as the 70 were.

This is such a great word and wonderful example on what it means to be a godly leader!

Moses didn't feel threatened by anointed men who could proclaim the Word of God.

He wasn't jealous of them or clutching at his position.

There is far too much jealousy and envy in the Church today, with pastors and leaders vying with one another for their piece of the religious pie.

The Local Church is not a business that's in competition with other local churches. It's a platoon of soldiers on a crater ridden battlefield who ought to be thrilled to discover there are other platoons on that battlefield as well.

We are not in competition with one another. Our fight is with the devil!

C. A Feast of Quail 11:31-35

³¹Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail from the sea and left *them* fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. ³²And the people stayed up all that day, 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. ³³But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague. ³⁴So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.

Several ancient historians make mention of the vast flocks of quail that live around the Mediterranean.

They were considered a great delicacy in Egypt and were consumed in such large numbers that their present populations have diminished significantly.

They are only able to fly over short distances and arrive at their destination exhausted and easily captured by hand.

They have been known to use the seas winds off the Mediterranean to cover longer distances across the Sinai.

That is the way God brought them to the camp of Israel here.

Arabs living near this region have recorded catches as great as 2 million using nets.

[2]

This flock of quail reached the end of their journey near the camp of Israel and flew around the camp from ground level up to 3 ft.; easy pickings for the people who just bat them to the ground.

The average take of quail was some 10 homers, or 10 arm-fulls. [3]

So the people gathered it, prepared it and began to eat.

They were so driven by their intense craving for meat v. 33 says that they barely chewed it but tried to just swallow it so they could tar off another bite.

Driven by their lusts and giving no thanks to God for His provision, the Lord sent a plague that killed many of those who were most driven by their cravings.

In Psalm 106:13-15 we read . . .

They soon forgot His works; They did not wait for His counsel, But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, And tested God in the desert. And He gave them their request, But sent leanness into their soul.

Remember that God was preparing the children of Israel to enter and take possession of the Promised Land.

They were still thinking and behaving like a bunch of whipped slaves, whining and complaining about how hard life was in the wilderness.

This was no group that was ready to square off against the mighty Canaanites! People who complain loudly & bitterly about a lack of meat aren't going to make a very disciplined army.

God was forging them into a nation of tough soldiers.

Step one would be to teach them that what they needed was not meat.

What they needed was God and to trust that what He had provided for them was the best.

After this adventure with the quail, they were content to stick with the manna.

God gave them what they wanted and complained so long and hard for – meat!

They had piles and piles of it until they gorged themselves on it and it rotted and stunk up the place.

They came to see that having things the way they thought was best wasn't so good.

Maybe it **IS** better to trust God and let Him provide His way and in His time.

What was true for them is true for us – we may get our way and find our belly full, but our soul will still be empty!

If we would trust God and follow His lead, then our souls will be satisfied and happy even if our bellies would like another helping.

Moses called the place Kibroth Hattaavah = “Graves of Craving.”

How many people today lie in a grave dug by their cravings for some fleshly pleasure? Too many!

35 From Kibroth Hattaavah the people moved to Hazeroth, and camped at Hazeroth.

Hazeroth = “fenced enclosure”

This was probably a large valley between the arms of a mountain

D. Moses' Leadership Challenged – Part 1 Ch. 12

1 Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

The first real challenge to Moses' leadership is going to come from an unexpected quarter – his own family.

Because Miriam is mentioned first, it's safe to conclude she was the instigator of this and got Aaron to go along with her.

That's Aaron's mode - follower. He was easily convinced by others.

The source of Miriam's beef with her younger brother Moses was his wife Zipporah.

Some are confused here because in Exodus we learn that Zipporah was a Midianite.

Ethiopia lies on the African continent across the Red Sea from the Arabian Peninsula, the location of Midian.

The solution to this is easy – the Hebrew word for Ethiopia is Cush and all of the people who settled both the northern and southern sides of the Red Seas were known as Cushites because they were all descendants of Cush, the grandson of Noah – firstborn son of Ham.

The Cushites were dark-skinned and were held in extremely low esteem by the Egyptians and Canaanites.

This prejudice surfaces here with Miriam's criticism of Moses for not marrying within the tribes of Israel.

Of course, when Moses married Zipporah, he had no idea he would ever see his people again.

What would drive Miriam and Aaron to launch this attack on Moses at this time?

Think about it – what had Moses just done? He'd just appointed 70 elders to positions of *leadership* in the nation.

What role did Miriam, the sister of Moses have? None!

But if it wasn't for her, Moses would have drowned in the Nile 80 years before!

It was Miriam who protected the little boat he'd been put in as an infant.

It was Miriam who stepped forward to tell Pharaoh's daughter that she knew of a wet-nurse who could take care of him till he was weaned.

Miriam felt cut out of the picture now – and chief to blame was Zipporah whose father in law had suggested Moses establish regional judges in the nation in Exodus 18.

That older wound was made fresh with the appointed now of the 70 and Miriam decided she'd had enough and launched an attack on Moses by going after his wife.

I've known good men in the ministry who their critics knew they couldn't get a hearing for if they attacked *directly*, so they went after their wife or their children. It seems there are always those who can be persuaded to think ill of those in leadership and seem to delight in digging up dirt on them.

We've seen so many leaders fall in the last couple decades many people have become almost *certain* all leaders are dirty.

They become cynical, not just of leaders, but of *leadership*.

This cynicism turns into a critical spirit that delights in scoffing and making constant negative remarks about others.

Many of us know people like this – maybe you shaved one this morning or are sitting in her chair tonight.

God's leaders are not perfect. There is only one who is perfect – His name is Jesus.

We must be very careful that we do not slip into the role of Miriam who could do nothing but criticize her brother, and the most damning thing she could lay at his feet was that he'd married -- a Cushite?

²So they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it.

Miriam and Aaron make a claim to anointing.

After all, hadn't God spoken through them too?

Aaron had been used *many times* to deliver God's word to the people.

Miriam had known the anointing of the Spirit when she composed the victory song on the eastern shore of the Red Sea.

If prophesy was a sign of the appointment of God to leadership of the nation as it had been for the 70 elders, then why weren't Miriam and Aaron numbered among them?

These two make common mistake – of thinking that just because the Lord has used them at some point in the past, that means they are qualified to serve as leaders.

Moses was the one God had called to lead the nation.

The 70 were called and gifted to *assist him* with the same vision and under his authority.

Aaron's role was to serve as high priest and lead in the worship of God, not to lead the nation in a civil capacity.

No role is given for Miriam beyond being a loyal sister and support to Moses.

As one in leadership, I can say with all sincerity that while that may not *seem* like a very important role – it's huge for those who are in leadership to know that their family is behind them and always ready to supply a word of encouragement and support.

When Miriam and Aaron came forward with this, on top of what Moses has already had to deal with in the complaining of the people, it had to be a real blow!

What's the real accusation they make here?

That Moses was arrogant & ambitious in assuming the position of leadership when it wasn't really his alone.

They were his *older* siblings and had played an important part in his earlier life.

Why, if it wasn't for them where would Moses be anyway?!?!

As Miriam and Aaron conspired together and began to sharpen their focus of criticism, the Lord was listening v. 2 says.

He heard their remarks and the charges they were cooking up.

³(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)

The charge they made against Moses was overweening *pride* – that he was arrogantly assuming a position of leadership God had not called him to.

Moses pens this little remark about himself – that he was a truly humble man! In fact, his humility was more sincere and far reaching than any other living soul.

Does that not sound like the height of arrogance?

I was thinking of writing a book – “*Humility: How I Attained It.*”

A first blush, what Moses says here seems self-contradictory.

But when we stop to consider it, we realize that either it is the supreme manifestation of pride or a literally true statement.

Humility is does not mean one thinks lowly of one's self.

It is not low self-esteem.

Humility means to have a right view of self, one free of pretense of self-delusion.

The man or woman who is truly humble is the one who knows the absolute truth about him/herself and accepts it.

If you look at the bottom of a worn and used fry pan, you might see a dim reflection of yourself – just a shape, but no details.

If you look at the bottom of a new fry pan, the reflection will be clearer but still few details.

Look into a metal mirror and the reflection will be clearer still but again the details are not refined.

A polished glass mirror will show you the truest reflection. Now you can see yourself clearly and honestly with all the details and flaws and imperfections, as well as the beauty that is there to behold!

But a glass mirror, as clear as it is can only reveal the outward appearance of a person.

A different kind of mirror is needed to see the inner person.

The mirror that shows the soul is the Word of God and the light needed is the Holy Spirit.

Moses had spent much time in the manifest presence of God and this had resulted in him knowing himself better than any person on the planet!
He knew where he was weak and where he was strong.
He knew what God had done in him and what needed to be done.
And he knew that he knew that he knew he was called to lead the nation.
He held that position, *not because he was ambitious* for it, but because he had been *assigned* to it.
So when he wrote v. 3, it was a statement of absolute fact!
Do not think humility means to think *lowly* of yourself.
Humility is defined by thinking *accurately* about yourself.
And here's what we can all say –

Left to ourselves, we are little more than the wretched scum that cakes the wall of creation!

But in Christ, we are the Sons and Daughters of God who are seated with Christ in heavenly places.

- Royal Princes & Princesses!
- Heirs of the King of the Universe.
- Beloved of the Most High.
- Adopted Children of the Lord of Eternal Glory.
- Holy Ones of a Righteous God.
- The Beautiful Bride of an Awesome King.
- Arwen to His Aragorn
- Snow White to His Prince Charming
- Cinderella to the King's Son

4Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!"

The text makes it clear; this was an abrupt command made in few words and not to be denied.

So the three came out. 5Then 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.

The pillar normally only appeared at the edge of the camp when it was time to move.

Usually the Lord's presence was manifest in the cloud that spread over head.

But now the pillar forms in the middle of the camp, at the door of the tent of meeting. And a voice comes from it calling Miriam and Aaron forward.

What do you suppose was going through their minds at this point?

Fear? Or certainty God would confirm them as leaders?

6Then 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. 7Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. 8I speak with him face to face, 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?"

God's typical way of revealing His message to His messengers is through visions and dreams.

He comes to them in these veiled ways because His holiness is too great to be

encountered in a more direct way. It would consume most people. Moses was different! He was such an unpretentious man, so in love with God and devoted to Him that God could come to Him in a more direct manner without destroying him.

This had so endeared Moses to God that when Moses was criticized by others, God took it personally!

Since Moses was humble and had left his appointment as leader of the nation in the hands of God, God would defend him when he was attacked.

⁹So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed.

¹⁰And 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. ¹¹So 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. ¹²Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother’s womb!”

God’s judgment on Miriam as the instigator of this challenge of Moses was instant and wholesale leprosy.

Aaron cried out in confession and repentance and asked that she be healed.

¹³So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, “Please heal her, O God, I pray!”

¹⁴Then 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*.”

To the people of the ancient Middle Eastern world, there was little that was more despicable than to spit in public.

It became a mark of absolute disdain!

One of the greatest insult you could level would be to spit at someone’s feet.

Spitting on them was the ultimate. If a relative spat on you, it was serious indeed! If a son or daughter had done something especially dishonorable, a father could show his utter disfavor by spitting in his/her face.

The child would then be banned from the house for 7 days.

When he/she returned the relationship *might* be renewed.

Giving Miriam leprosy was God’s way of showing what she had done was terribly dishonorable and God was highly displeased.

He will heal her, but she must endure a week of being outside the camp.

¹⁵So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in *again*.

This was a harsh judgment for Miriam, but it gives us an idea of how seriously God takes the criticism of those who are dear to Him and whom He’s called to lead His people.

This ought to place a serious caution in all our hearts regarding our attitude toward leaders.

¹⁶And afterward the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran.

They are drawing near the border of the Promise Land and the moment of decision.

[1] Guzik, David *Online Commentary*

[2] Easton, M. (1996, c1897). *Easton's Bible dictionary*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. [These birds (the *Coturnix vulgaris* of naturalists) are found in countless numbers on the shores of the Mediterranean, and their annual migration is an event causing great excitement.]

[3] 1 homer = 8 bushels (4.3 dry US gallons) 10 homers = 80 bushels = 344 gallons ; this is the standard homer of the ancient world. The word used here is the older homer and may simply mean “heap” a heap being defined by how much one could hold in one’s arms.