

Moses - 7 - Difficulties in the Life of God's Lawgiver

Israel Complained and Moses Pleaded with God

Now 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.** 2 Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched. 3 So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the Lord had burned among them. Num 11:1-3

Now 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? 5 **We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic;** 6 but now our whole being is dried up; **there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!**" Num 11:4-6

Then **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. 11 So 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?** 12 Did 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? 13 **Where 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.' 14 **I am not able to bear all these people alone,** because the burden is too heavy for me. 15 **If 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!**" Num 11:10-15

God blessed Moses by giving the Spirit to seventy elders in Israel. Joshua was deeply concerned but Moses manifested both maturity and unselfishness. He did not covet the position of leadership and saw it only as an act of service. Consequently the more help the better and he felt no need to grasp power.

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. 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. 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.** Num 11:24-30

Miriam and Aaron Complain about Moses

This passage reveals the loneliness of God's prophet and lawgiver. All the people have grumbled and complained until Moses had begged God to remove him from the earth. With these seventy elders now in place, a time of relief ought to have occurred, but instead, Miriam and Aaron take up the same grumbling and murmuring that the rest of Israel had been doing.

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. 2 So they said, "**Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?**" And the Lord heard it. 3 (Now **the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.**) 4 Suddenly the Lord said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. 5 Then the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. Num 12:1-6

This is a powerful example of Jesus promise that if we humble ourselves we will be exalted.

But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. 11 But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Mt. 23:8-12

Jesus also described this in the parable of the wedding feast where he advised we take the lowest seat and allow another to call us to a higher position (Lk 14:7-11) and in the parable of the publican and the pharisee (Lk. 18:9-14). In both he concluded with "*For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*"

Not only did God exalt Moses, but he humbled Miriam. Moses did not stand up against this jealousy and bitterness. But God stood up for him.

"Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I

Speak to him in a dream. 7 Not so with My servant Moses; **He is faithful in all My house.** 8 **I speak with him face to face,** 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?** 9 So the anger of the Lord was aroused against them, and He departed. 10 And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, **suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow.** Num 12:6-10

Twelve Sent to “Spy Out” the Land of Canaan(Num 13-14; Deut 1:19-46)

This event shows very clearly the words of Hebrews:

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. Heb. 4:2-3

First, God was giving Israel the opportunity to find out how beautiful and productive the land they were about to enter would be.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 **“Send men to spy out the land of Canaan,** which I am giving to the children of Israel; **from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man,** every one a leader among them.” ... 17 Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, “Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, 18 and **see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many;** 19 **whether the land they dwell in is good or bad;** whether the **cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds;** 20 **whether the land is rich or poor;** and whether **there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land.**” Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes. Num 13:1-2; 17-20

There was a stark contrast between ten of these “spies” who looked at things only from a heart of unbelief and two who saw things through the eyes of faith. Joshua and Caleb had made good use of their hearts during the ten plagues, opening of the Red Sea and the events at Sinai. They knew God had made a covenant with them and they trusted God. He had already proven His power against Egypt.

But the ten spies did not make this application.

Then they told him, and said: “We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 Nevertheless **the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there.** 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.” 30 Then **Caleb quieted the people** before Moses, and said, **“Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.”** 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, **“We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.”** 32 **And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land** which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone as spies is **a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature.** 33 There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and **we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.**” Num. 13:27-33

It was then up to Israel to decide who they would heed and as they had since they left Egypt they chose the path of unbelief. They rejected God and His power and listened to the bad report of the ten spies.

So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. 2 **And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, “If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness!”** 3 **Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?”** 4 So they said to one another, **“Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.”** Num 14:1-4

“Nevertheless you would not go up, but **rebelled against the command of the Lord your God;** 27 and you **complained in your tents,** and said, **‘Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.’** 28 Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, “The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.” Deut 1:26-28

The next morning, Joshua, Caleb and Moses all tried to reason with them.

But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, **tore their clothes;** 7 and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: “The land we passed through to spy out is **an exceedingly good land.** 8 **If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, ‘a land which flows with milk and honey.’** 9 **Only do not rebel** against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them.” Num 14:6-9

“Then I said to you, **‘Do not be terrified, or afraid of them.’** 30 The Lord your God, who goes before you, **He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes,** 31 and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.’ 32 **Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God,** 33 who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire

by night and in the cloud by day. Deut 1:29-33

The people refused all exhortation and reproof. Deciding to stone them all to death, God then intervened.

And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel. Num 14:10

Once again, Moses becomes the mediator, interceding for the people after God decided to destroy them.

Then the Lord said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? 12 **I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.**" 13 And Moses said to the Lord: "Then **the Egyptians will hear it,** for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, 14 and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, Lord, are among these people; that You, Lord, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 Now **if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying, 16 'Because the Lord was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness.'** 17 And now, I pray, **let the power of my Lord be great,** just as You have spoken, saying, 18 'The Lord is **longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression;** but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.' 19 Pardon the iniquity of this people, **I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.**" Num 14:11-19

Although God pardoned them it was at this time that God decreed that none over forty would enter the land of Canaan except Joshua and Caleb.

Then the Lord said: "**I have pardoned, according to your word;** 21 but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord — 22 because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, 23 **they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.**" Num 14:20-23

Say to them, 'As I live,' says the Lord, **'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you:** 29 The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, **from twenty years old and above.** 30 **Except for Caleb** the son of Jephunneh and **Joshua** the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. 31 **But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised.** 32 **But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness.** Num 14:28-33

Now **the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land,** who returned and made all the congregation complain against him by bringing a bad report of the land, 37 **those very men who brought the evil report about the land, died by the plague before the Lord.** 38 But **Joshua** the son of Nun and **Caleb** the son of Jephunneh **remained alive,** of the men who went to spy out the land. Num 14:36-38

After the Lord decreed they shall not enter Canaan, they then decide to force God's hand by entering the land of Canaan and seeking to gain possession. Moses warned them, but again they fail to believe.

Then **Moses told these words** to all the children of Israel, and the **people mourned greatly.** 40 And they **rose early in the morning** and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, "**Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the Lord has promised, for we have sinned!**" 41 And Moses said, "Now **why do you transgress the command of the Lord?** For this will not succeed. 42 **Do not go up, lest you be defeated** by your enemies, for **the Lord is not among you.** 43 For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from the Lord, the Lord will not be with you." 44 **But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop.** Nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the Lord nor Moses departed from the camp. 45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and **attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah.** Num 14:39-45

Things have not changed much for the people of the Lord. We still have some who cannot trust in the Lord to work out his plan. They seek to aid Him with organizations that have human wisdom. While God wanted church autonomy, man seeks a human power structure. While God gave all the work of evangelism, edification and benevolence to the local church, man doesn't trust God so he creates missionary societies or human institutions to do the work God gave to the church. They do not have the faith and submission to do things as God commands and then trust in His power and wisdom to do the rest.