

The Book of Numbers

Lesson 6

Chapters 12:1 – 13:29

Family Trouble at Hazeroth

^{Num 12:1} Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (~~for he had married a Cushite woman~~); ^{12:2} and they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" And the LORD heard it. ^{12:3} (~~Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.~~)

Considering the timing of all that had transpired since leaving Egypt and the setting aside of the Levites for service with the final instructions which occurred on the first day of the fourteenth month, we see that on the twentieth day of the month the camp departed and traveled for three days before stopping for a short period. Then they moved to Kilbroth-hattaavah where they camped for more than a month. With that, the Israelites had been out of Egypt at least sixteen months and maybe as many as eighteen. Three months were spent on the road to Mount Sinai, eleven months and twenty days were spent at Mount Sinai and they had been on the road for at least two to four months before they arrived at their current camp at Hazeroth. We are not sure how long they stayed at Hazeroth, but we should allow at least another month. Therefore, we are approximately nineteen months out of Egypt and according to the story Moses had been extremely busy between meetings with the LORD on Mount Sinai until the Tabernacle project began. Then there were all the interactions with the people and the construction project and the days of the dedication services. We might stop here to ask the question, "When did Moses have time to even think about a woman much less marry a Cushite woman?"

Before we discuss the Cushite woman, let us consider another question, "Where in the world was Moses' wife of almost forty years – Zipporah?" In Exodus, almost three months after the departure from Egypt, but before the camp arrived at Mount Sinai, Zipporah, their two sons and Moses' father-in-law joined Moses at the site where Moses struck the rock for water. It was there that Moses' father-in-law recommended that Moses enlist some help with judging the people. In the last lesson, we discovered that the LORD had finally instructed Moses to select seventy men to help with that task.

Zipporah had not gone to Egypt with Moses. She rejoined him toward the last of three months after leaving Egypt, and we have not heard a word about her since. Neither was she mentioned again in the rest of the Bible. Her brother was mentioned in Numbers 10:29, but we are not sure if he joined Moses for the trip to Kadish Barnea. The last major event with her in the Bible was when she circumcised her son when Moses was on the way to Egypt before she returned to her father's house. Did she leave Moses at that time? Was her visit to him with her father the last time Moses saw her? Did she die? We do not know!

Moses had married a Cushite woman. What does Cushite mean? It means she was a descendant of Cush. Cush was the oldest son of Ham and the grandson of Noah. After the Tower of Babel, Cush and his family settled in the region south of Egypt where his brother Mizraim settled (Mizraim means Egypt). Cush and his family were the darkest skinned people on earth at that time and now. His brothers Mizraim, Canaan, and Phut were much lighter in skin color with Phut being the second darkest. As time progressed, the Greeks called the Cushites *Æthiopians*. The Latin of the 1400s AD attached the word *nigrum* meaning *black* to the Cushites. By the middle of the 1500s AD, Spanish (a descendant language from Latin) called the color *negro*. However, the Cushite name change to *Ethiopians* occurred in the 300s BC after Alexander the Great conquered Egypt along with Cush, Phut and several other nations. Thus, the woman Moses married was black skinned and most definitely not a descendant of Jacob.

The question we cannot answer is “When did Moses marry this woman?” Was he married to her before the LORD called him at the burning bush? That question suggests that Moses was married to two women at the same time during the forty years he lived in Midian. Polygamy was common in the land of Midian at that time. Polygamy included concubines. Was this Cushite a concubine? They were considered secondary wives as was the case with Abram/Hagar and Jacob/Bilhah/Zilpah. Was she a maid of Zipporah? Did Zipporah leave her with Moses while she stayed with her father where she had lived all her life even while married to Moses? Did Moses marry the Cushite while he was in Egypt? The strict law of the LORD was in place at the time Moses was on Mount Sinai and forbade an Israelite to marry a foreign woman but not in place during the plagues of Egypt and before. Did the marriage occur before the Law was given? Did the Cushite woman come out of Egypt with the Israelites or did she join him when Jethro came to meet Moses at Horeb? Did Moses marry her while they were camped at Mount Sinai? Did he marry her after they left Mount Sinai within the last 90 days? We do not know the answers to all these questions.

To add to the confusion, we do not know why Miriam and Aaron were so against this Cushite woman. Was it because Moses had married her? Was it specifically because Moses had married a Cushite (black) woman? Was it because Moses had taken a second wife? Was it because Moses had taken a concubine? Perhaps it was for none of those reasons! Perhaps the Cushite woman simply did not get along with Miriam and Aaron, or, rather, Miriam and Aaron did not get along with the Cushite woman. We do not know the answers to any of these questions. The bottom line in this story is this; Miriam and Aaron were unhappy with Moses’ Cushite wife.

Miriam and Aaron made a dreadful mistake. They said, **“Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?”** When did the Lord ever speak to Miriam or Aaron? When did the LORD speak personally with Miriam or Aaron without the presence of Moses? When did Miriam and Aaron receive a word from the LORD except through Moses? Never! We do not know why the two had a problem with the Cushite but we do know why the LORD had a problem with them. The two were guilty of overstepping their boundaries with the LORD by making a false claim.

The LORD's Intervention

Num 12:4 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. **12:5** 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, **12:6** 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. **12:7** "Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; **12:8** 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?" **12:9** So the anger of the LORD burned against them and He departed.

At the tent, the LORD addressed them personally. In the past and in the future, the LORD will speak with many in different ways. He spoke to the prophets through visions and dreams. But also notice that the LORD uses the word "if." It is a word that indicates the possibility that there were no true prophets in the camp.

The word "prophet" means one to whom the LORD had spoken and told to deliver a specific message. Neither Miriam nor Aaron had been granted that privilege.

Moses was privileged to speak with the LORD, not in visions and dreams but "mouth to mouth." That term means they spoke with each other in normal conversations as two friends might. Furthermore, Moses had seen the LORD but Miriam and Aaron had not.

The LORD had said enough to indicate He questioned the intent of Moses' siblings. His wording indicated they should have known better. Because they tried to usurp the relationship between Moses and the LORD, they were guilty and without excuse. Miriam was the oldest of the three; Aaron was next in line. Moses was the baby and they had known him for 40 years before he ran from Egypt. Then they did not speak to him for 40 years while he was living in Midian. Deep down inside people are the same in many ways when they are old as they were when they were young. The *School of Hard Knocks* is often the one thing that makes us change our minds as to how we do things as older people. Moses was still a baby brother, and the two older siblings had dismissed the great encounter he had had with the LORD of all. They had refused to submit to the anointment of the Lord on his life. Miriam and Aaron should have known better. They should have been more careful with their words. Words have meanings and words bring about consequences. Consequences were about to fall from the LORD.

Miriam's Leprosy

Num 12:10 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.

The three had heard the LORD speaking from the cloud that surrounded them. The cloud was usually above the Tabernacle. It looked like a column rising into the air. That cloud became a pillar of fire at night. For this conversation, the cloud moved down to cover the tent. Actually, because of the wording, the cloud may have engulfed them too. When the LORD finished speaking to them, the cloud returned to its position above the Tabernacle. Upon the removal of

the cloud, Miriam was covered with leprous sores. She was unclean, head to toe. No doubt Moses was not shocked; he had seen the mighty power of the LORD many times. Aaron was shocked and stunned.

Aaron's Plea

Num 12:11 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. **12:12** "Oh, do not let her be like one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes from his mother's womb!"

The sight of his sister's condition caused Aaron to realize the extent of his foolishness and sin. He quickly turned to Moses in humility. He was concerned for the life of his sister. Because she was covered with white sores from head to toe, Aaron was fearful that her skin was about to fall from her while she was still alive. No doubt Aaron had seen the delivery of a still-born child, one that had been dead for many days before the body finally delivered the it, a child wasted away before it came into the light of day. In that case, Miriam was well on the way to a physical death. But under the Law, she was ceremonially dead already in the society. His plea to Moses was heartfelt and repentant.

Moses' Cry

Num 12:13 Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "O God, heal her, I pray!"

"O God, heal her, I pray!" How refreshing! To the point. No mess. No fuss. No long platitudes. The desire stated. The pain expressed. This commentary is longer than the prayer. Nevertheless, Moses' prayer should be a model for all of us. We do not need to negotiate with the LORD; He knows our hearts and desires. However, His answer is not always "yes."

LORD's Answer

Num 12:14 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."

To spit in the face was the final act of expressing one's total disgust for another. In the eastern mindset, once a father spit in the face of a child, that child was disinherited. The relationship was over. Only the father could restore the relationship and the minimum time before he would even consider restoring the child was seven days. In the LORD's words we see a confirmation of that belief and practice. Here the LORD will not change her circumstance for seven days.

In Deuteronomy 25:9, we see the finality of spitting in one's face again. There, spitting in the face is in reference to a childless widowed woman who needed a kinsman redeemer to carry on the name of her dead spouse by giving her a child. If the male relative refused, she was to spit in his face; his options with her were terminated.

Miriam's Punishment

Num 12:15 So Miriam was shut up outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until Miriam was received again.

Because of Miriam's sin, the whole camp was in limbo until her time of punishment was completed. And so it is with sin; it never affects just the sinner; every sin always affects innocent bystanders eventually! Six hundred thousand men, twenty years and older and their families were affected by Miriam's sin! What was her sin? She questioned the God ordained authority of Moses.

Camp's Move

Num 12:16 Afterward, however, the people moved out from Hazeroth and camped in the wilderness of Paran.

Hazeroth was not a place where the Israelites wanted to stay. The punishment of Miriam was enough. When the seven days of her leprosy were over, the LORD must have healed her and she was allowed back in the main camp in the family area of Moses and Aaron, directly east and in front of the Tabernacle complex. When the cloud moved, the people moved. This time the LORD took them all the way to Kadesh Barnea. We will see the name Kadesh later in Numbers 20. It was in the Wilderness of Paran but it was also in the Canaanite land. Canaan was a grandson of Noah, the son of Ham. He was the brother of Cush (Ethiopian), Mizram (Egyptian) and Phut (Libyan). Canaan's land had been promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob over 430 years before.

Spies Sent From Paran at Kadish

Num 13:1 Then **the LORD spoke to Moses** saying, **13:2** "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."

13:3 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.

The LORD told Moses to send twelve men to "spy out the land of Canaan." When we think of the word "spy" our minds go immediately to the idea of a covert secretive operation. But the Hebrew is *weyaturu* and it means to *search out*. This trip was not a secret mission. The King James Version properly used the word *search*. Preachers and theologians in the western world have made this passage out to be an underground, secretive mission, but it was not. The twelve men simply walked into Canaan's Land, surveyed the people, the land and returned with their report. The Canaanites knew they were visiting the land.

Names of Spies

13:4 These then *were* their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur; **13:5** from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori; **13:6** from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; **13:7** from the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph; **13:8** from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun; **13:9** from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu; **13:10** from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi; **13:11** from the tribe of Joseph, from the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi; **13:12** from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli; **13:13** from the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael; **13:14** from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi; **13:15** from the tribe of Gad,

Geuel the son of Machi. ^{13:16} These are the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land; but Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua.

The Twelve Men Who Search Out the Land of Canaan

TRIBE	NAME
Reuben	Shammua
Simeon	Shaphat
Judah	Caleb
Issachar	Igal
Ephraim	Hoshea (Joshua)
Benjamin	Palti
Zebulun	Gaddiel
Joseph/Manasseh	Gaddi
Dan	Ammiel
Ashur	Sethur
Naphtali	Nahbi
Gad	Geuel

Lists of names can be quite boring, especially in the Bible where the people are long since dead and not our relatives. Some people, however, think that the names of their own relatives are boring, but not the Israelites and that is what makes this list to important. However, lists often provide tidbits of information that clarify details not found elsewhere in the Scripture. Verse 11 says, “from the tribe of Joseph, from the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi.” This important information in this verse could be easily overlooked but it answers a question we had earlier. In the last days of Jacob’s life, he promised Joseph that he would have a double portion in the Promised Land. Manasseh was placed by Joseph on the left of Jacob. It was the place of prominence for the firstborn to receive a blessing. Ephraim was placed on the left, the place for a lesser blessing. But Jacob crossed his hands and gave Ephraim the primary blessing and Manasseh the secondary. When the tribes were divided into the camp, the LORD removed Levi from the general body of the nation and gave them to the priests as helpers. When they were removed, one of Joseph’s sons was allowed to take their place in the general nation and the other would hold Joseph’s place, thus giving Joseph two parts in the twelve tribes of Israel who would receive land grants in the Promised Land. Verse 11 indicates that it was Manasseh, Joseph’s oldest son who would represent him in the nation. Ephraim, Joseph’s younger son, would take the place of Levi in the general public. Verse 8 says, “from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun.” Joseph is not mentioned here which means that Ephraim stood alone in rank. Notice that it was “Hoshea” who represented Ephraim in the band that searched out the land. In verse 16 the text says, “Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua.” He was the young assistant to Moses to whom the LORD would transfer the leadership of the Nation of Israel when it was time to enter the Promised Land. Joshua must be younger than 20 years of age at this time. He will live to be 110. That means that he will serve Moses until he is about 56 – 58 years old and then be the leader of the Israelites for 52 – 54 years, at least 14 years longer than Moses was their leader!

Instructions for Spies

13:17 When Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, he said to them, "Go up there into the Negev; then go up into the hill country. 13:18 "See what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong *or* weak, whether they are few or many. 13:19 "How is the land in which they live, is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they live, are *they* like *open* camps or with fortifications? 13:20 "How is the land, is it fat or lean? Are there trees in it or not? Make an effort then to get some of the fruit of the land." Now the time was the time of the first ripe grapes.



The Nation of Israel had arrived at Kadesh Barnea in the Wilderness of Paran. This wilderness is a part of the large desert area called the Negev; north of the Wilderness of Paran is the Wilderness of Zin as shown on the map. The instruction sends the spies through the Negev up into the hill country. The map to the left is a modern map. The West Bank, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and the country of Jordan did not exist by those names in the days of Moses. However, Hebron did and it was in the hill country west of the Dead Sea. It was the place of the burial of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rachel and many more relatives of the Israelites.

Moses had never been to Canaan Land. He wanted to know about the people, the cities and the land, strong, weak, many, few, good, bad, and wanted them to bring back some fruit.

Grapes are mentioned in this passage. All ancient sources agree that the first grapes were ready for harvest in June. The grape vines would continue to produce until September in Canaan. Because the passage says these were the “first grapes,” the spies were leaving Kadesh in June or July. The nation left Mount Sinai on Iyar 20th, 2724 ACA or Monday, May 30th, 1463.¹¹ It marched three days and camped at Taberah. It then moved to Kirbroth and stayed there at least 30 days. It moved to Hazeroth and stayed there at least a week. Then it moved to Kadesh. With all of that in place, it was middle to late July when the spies were sent into Canaan Land and returned, two years out from Egypt.

Journey of the Spies

13:21 So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, at Lebo-hamath. 13:22 When they had gone up into the Negev, they came to Hebron where Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmi, the descendants of Anak were. (~~Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.~~) 13:23 Then they came to the valley of Eshcol and from there cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes; and they carried it on a pole between two *men*, with some of the pomegranates and the figs. 13:24 That place was

¹¹ See Dr. Jim Hastings, *Book of Days*. Volume 1, © 2018.

called the valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the sons of Israel cut down from there. ^{13:25} When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days, ^{13:26} they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land.

Just northwest of Hebron was the Valley of Eschol where the grapes were gathered to take back to Moses. In Hebron, the descendants of Anak lived. Who was Anak? Anak and the three sons mentioned in this passage were known for being tall and having long necks. The name “Anak” means *tall and long necked*. In Joshua 11:22, they are called “Anakim.” These tall people were known throughout the region. Joshua would kill the immediate descendants of these men, but their relatives would move into the Gaza area and live among the Philistines. In the book of Joshua, they are called “Nephilim” which means *renown or known about*. Everyone in the region knew about these tall people. It does not mean that they were giants. If they had been giants, the Hebrew would have called them *raphah*, not *nephilim*. Goliath was from a group of giants (*raphah*).

The trip took 40 days which means it was September of 1462 BC when they returned to Kadesh. More than two years had passed since leaving Egypt.

Report of the Spies

^{13:27} 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. ^{13:28} "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. ^{13:29} "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."

The report from the twelve told Moses the names of the groups they would have to defeat in the area they surveyed.

Amalek lived in the Negev just north of Kadesh Barnea. Amalek has been dead for a long time; this reference is to the many descendants of Amalek. They will come to be known as Amalekites, cousins of the Israelites. The father of the Israelites was Jacob. His twin brother was Esau, the grandfather of Amalek. In Exodus 17:8-13, the LORD instructed the Israelites to wipe the Amalekites from the face of the earth. They will not obey the LORD and it will come back to haunt them for generations. The spies traveled through the Amalekite land with no trouble; therefore, this report must be a message to Moses that the Amalekites, in the Negev, would be the group the Israelites would meet and need to deal with first.

In the hill country, the Hittites and the Jebusites would be the next groups the Israelites would face. Both were descendants of Ham's son, Canaan. The Hittites were descendants of Canaan's son, Heth. The Jebusites were descendants of Canaan and they controlled the area that would be

called Jerusalem by David. The Amorites were also descendants of Canaan. All of these groups were Canaanites and they were spread from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River.

The Jordan River is first mentioned in Genesis with the story of Abram and Lot. We readily recognize the river by name; however, the Hebrew was *yarden* and it means *the watering place*. It still begins at Mount Hermon with four water sources merging to provide the water that flows to the Dead Sea. Before the formation of the Dead Sea, when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, the Jordan ran all the way to the east tributary of the Red Sea (Sea of Aqaba) and watered the Negev.

It was time for the vote and Caleb was the first to speak. His opinion will be addressed first in the next lesson.

