



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor  
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# NUMBERS 12

## Numbers Series

[PRAYER] Because sometimes, Lord, it feels like we're away from your presence or you're not there. When we ask for things and they don't come out the way we'd like or when we experience some challenges and the hardships that are there, it's hard sometimes to live the life that we live. We want to hear you, we want to see you, we want to know that you are working in our hearts. It's that presence that we want to keep close to us every day. Lord, we know that sometimes it's because we drifted away from you and haven't spent our time with you and haven't had that quiet time and enjoyed who you are. So we ask that you'd bring us back to that. Bring us back to a commitment before you where that study of the word of God is precious, special. Lord, we want in our private times to be close to you. Heavenly Father, as we now look at your word that you've given to us, I ask that you would draw us into your presence in a new way today. Help us to experience who you are and who we are and how we fit into your plan. Speak to us now, we ask in Jesus' name, amen.

I decided just to do Numbers 12. I was going to do chapters 12 13, 14, but the more I studied Numbers 12, I'm thinking, "Man, we've got to park right here."

I don't know about you, but there are some times when I really enjoy hearing from the Lord, I enjoy talking to the Lord, I enjoy praying and seeing prayers answered. I enjoy having my spiritual glasses on so I can see the Lord working in our world and go, "Wow. There He is again. Oh, there He is again." And I like to share those things with other people. I like to tell people about the Lord.

But sometimes don't you feel (maybe you feel this way) like as you're sharing the message that God has given you or you're sharing what God is doing in your life that it's almost like other people feel inferior or they can look at you and say, "Who are you that you hear from the Lord? I hear from the Lord too. I'm a good person." That kind of sense that sometimes people have. That's what we see in this passage in Numbers 12.

So I think what God is going to do for us today, He's going to address that issue where we all want to hear from the Lord, we want to be spiritual, we want to know what God is doing, and we want to share that with other people, but we want to do it in a way that they can receive. Some people won't receive it. Some people will criticize and they'll say, "Who do you think you are? You're the holy person? Why are you better than me?"

It's that very issue that's addressed in Numbers 12. It's just such a practical passage that I don't want to gloss over it quickly. It's in the Old Testament, locked away in the book of Numbers, but

God has some special things that He shares with us in the midst of that that I want you to be able to see here.

So look at Numbers 12:1. *Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite.*

Now Aaron and Miriam are the siblings of Moses. So what we have here is some sibling conflict taking place among these adult siblings. Here we have two of these people, Miriam and Aaron, looking at Moses and they're finding something wrong with him and they're criticizing him about it. The thing they're finding that's wrong or they're criticizing him about is he has a Cushite wife.

Now a Cushite – Cush is the land where they came from, the Egyptians. This was an African woman that he had married. There was no prohibition against marrying an African. They couldn't marry the Canaanites, but he married this woman who probably came out of Egypt during the exodus. We read in the book of Exodus when they came out that there was a whole group of people that came with them that weren't Jewish people, but they wanted to be with them. So they were part of the group of people that came out of Egypt as part of the exodus. It's one of those women that Moses probably married.

But as in most conflict, often the initial concern or the initial problem isn't the underlying issue. Maybe you've discovered that as you work with people, but the underlying issue is often something different than what's presented.

So in verse 1 it talks about how they were criticizing Moses because of his Cushite wife. Zipporah was his first wife and maybe she has passed away by now. She doesn't seem to be on the scene at this point. So maybe then he went and married someone else.

But there's another underlying issue going on here, which we read about in the second verse. In the second verse it says, *"Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the Lord heard this.*

So now we come to the underlying issue where Miriam and Aaron are coming and they're criticizing Moses for this wife, but they're really saying, "Are you the only one who can hear from God? Are you the only one who has this uplink with God? Doesn't God speak to us just the way He speaks to you?" Now we're at the underlying issue, which seems to be some kind of a pride that Miriam and Aaron have.

The problem is probably initiated by Miriam. Let me say that. The reason why is because she is the one who's going to get judged with leprosy in a moment. She's the one who's mentioned first, *Miriam and Aaron*, and the verb there *began to talk* is the feminine antecedent. So the idea here is that Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses, but they're saying, *"Has the Lord only spoken through Moses? Doesn't He also speak through us?"* Very interesting question. And of course God does speak to all people. But in this case, God was leading through Moses and God was speaking to Moses.

You know, as we try to share Christ with other people or the message that God has given us, then sometimes people react to that by feeling like we're being spiritually prideful. Like "Who are you to be sharing this with me?"

When we started the church I shared with a pastor about our focus on family ministry and how this is a church that is committed to strong marriages, strong parenting, really trying to help families be successful in their relationships together. His response was, "What, do you think the rest of us aren't concerned about family?" It's like he took off on that as if I was somehow being spiritually prideful.

God has given us a certain call and as I share that with people a lot of people like that. But every once in a while someone will come up to you because you talk about the Lord or you talk about what God's doing in your life and they make a statement or a sense of "Who are you anyway? Who do you think you are that you are more spiritual than I am?"

I have a cousin whom I started interacting with several years ago. His name is Ron. He's a neat guy. He's an atheist and he wants me to know it. He knows I'm a Christian, he knows I'm a pastor. We started interacting together about spiritual things and talking about spiritual things. I want to be very careful in my presentation with him as I interact with him about spiritual things that I don't appear arrogant.

I do believe there is one right way to get to heaven. I do believe that God sent Jesus Christ to be our Savior. I do believe that you have to have Jesus Christ in your heart in order to be saved. I believe that. That's really important because that's the truth of God's word. I don't just believe it and therefore it's true; I believe it because that's what God's word says and that becomes important.

But it's fascinating that people who have other opinions often find it offensive when we take a strong stand about Christianity. When we try to take a stand and say, "This is right," as soon as you start saying something "this is right," people start viewing you as arrogant, intolerant of other people and they don't like it. It's an awkward place to be, I find, and so now Moses is in this rather challenging place.

When I was in college I took several philosophy courses and I was very vocal about my faith in college, many times more vocal than my wisdom allowed. I didn't have answers. I would say things sometimes blundering and I wouldn't have an answer to the response. But it drove me back to get answers. So I learned a lot. In fact I felt like someday writing a book, *How to Get a Christian Education Out of a Secular School*, because I think you can if you're testing your faith and allowing people to see what you believe and allowing God to grow you. What a great way to grow by being tested, by sharing who you are in Jesus Christ. Because a lot of people won't believe it.

I took this one course, a philosophy course on ethics. It was a discussion class. Well I'm interacting with these people – what is truth anyway? How do you determine what is truth? And it isn't easy. For me it's a real fast answer. We don't need a class for this. The Bible says it, so I believe it, and that settles it. But that wasn't fair for them. They didn't like it. So I spent the

whole term dialoguing in class about faith and what makes something true. I learned so much in that class. Probably frustrated a lot of people because I was pretty rigid in one sense about what I believe. But I tried not to be arrogant.

I know you try not to be arrogant with people. But sometimes in an attempt not to be arrogant we pull back so much that we don't even share Jesus because we don't want to present ourselves, we don't want to appear to be arrogant, and so we don't even share Jesus at all and we miss out on something I think is very significant. People need the gospel. People need to hear the message of who God is. How are they going to hear it unless we share it? And when we share it, people are going to roll their eyes. Some people are going to be disgusted with us. But there are other people who are going to say, "That's what I need. I'm missing something in my life. I want that." And that's why we share who we are with others.

I suspect that this passage is illustrating something that's particularly hurtful for Moses. Because Moses shared God's word and spoke God's word with Pharaoh and all those guys and he was rejected by them. And that's okay. They're not even believers, so to speak, so it would make sense that the world would reject him.

Moses shared a message with the Israelites and they often were complaining to him. That was probably a little more hurtful because he's trying to lead these people. So he goes to God, "God what do I do with these people?" as we've already read in Numbers 11.

But I think this is even more hurtful for Moses because this is somebody in his family. These are people who are coming and saying, "Who do you think you are that you always have to pray before meals? Who do you think you are that you're always talking about God? Why don't you just leave it for Sunday? Why do you keep doing it? How come you go to church so many times?" It's hurtful when a family -- and I know some of you have family that are not saved and they criticize you for your faith. They look down on you for your faith. There are people that you like, friends that you have, and they criticize you because of your faith. That's what's happening in here, it appears, for Moses. So I sense this is probably a hard thing for him.

That's why I think verse 3 is placed here in the passage because of the wrestling that takes place. When you hear from God and you start to speak, you become more confident in God's word, and you say, "You've got to know this. I've seen this person get healed, and I've seen this marriage get well, and I've seen this person experience healing in there, and I've seen financial problems solved over here. I've seen these things and you tell me this problem you're having. You've got to know Jesus." That's what you want to say to people. You just develop this confidence because you hear and you see God working regularly. But you're also trying to be humble.

So that's why in verse 3 notice it says – *Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.* Wow. Just so that we understand that it's not spiritual pride that he had that Miriam and Aaron were speaking against. They just didn't like that he was the one that was getting the message. They can hear from God, but God had chosen Moses to be this primary leader.

Moses was a humble guy. Just remember back to his call and when he was called at the burning bush by God. “God, I can’t do this. What am I going to say when the Pharaoh says, ‘Who told you to come and talk to me?’ What am I supposed to say to that?” He had five excuses in the book of Exodus that he shared. But God spoke to him and so God says, “Okay look.”

Moses says, “I don’t have a good voice. I can’t really talk to people.”

God says, “Okay. You’ve got a brother. His name is Aaron. He’ll be your mouthpiece.” I’m going to send you off.”

Moses began to hear the Lord speak, so reluctantly goes to Pharaoh and he says, “God told me to come here and let our people go in sacrifice.”

Pharaoh says, “You’ve got to be kidding me. Your people have so much time on their hands they want to go sacrifice? I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. I’m going to give them more work to do. They’re not only going to have to make the bricks, they’re going to have to go and get the straw to make the bricks and they’re going to have to keep up the same census of bricks. They’re going to have to move forward here. I’m not going to cut down and let them worship their God in the wilderness. No way. I’m not going to do that.” So Pharaoh then rejected the word of the Lord.

Then the Israelites started rising up to Moses and saying, “Moses, why are you doing this? Don’t you see you’re creating more work for us? You’re creating a problem here.”

Moses is saying, “All I’m doing is speaking for the Lord. All I’m doing is telling you what God told me to do.” And so he continues on to share what God is telling him. So Moses goes before Pharaoh ten times about the ten plagues. The last time after the plague of darkness, after that, Pharaoh says, “Don’t ever come into my presence again. Don’t come in here again. I don’t want to see your face again.”

Moses said, “Okay. I won’t. I’m not coming back in here again.”

And then comes the tenth plague, the loss of the firstborn. Pharaoh says, “Find that guy Moses!” He comes after Moses himself. He says, “Okay, okay. Take your people and get out of here and we’ll give you all kinds of stuff.” And so they end up leaving and in the midst of that God was working and doing something really dramatic.

Moses heard from the Lord and all the times he heard it didn’t produce good things sometimes, in the sense that there was more challenges that the Israelites experienced, Pharaoh didn’t respond to Moses. But in the end, God was working. So Moses’ job was to listen to the Lord and share that message and leave the rest of it to God. And God does an amazing thing. He rescues the people out of Egypt with all kinds of wealth. They leave there. God produced some powerful things.

Moses now has been listening to God for a while. It started at the burning bush. But he’s been listening to God now speak and he’s been acting on it and he has this confidence that he’s building that when God speaks we need to listen and we need to do what He says. God produces.

Notice in the next verse, verse 4. *At once the Lord said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, “Come out to the tent of meeting, all three of you.”* It just kind of reminds me of a dad calling his siblings

who are in conflict. First He says *at once*. In other words, suddenly. There's a suddenness about it. He says, "Hey, you three. *Come out to the tent of meeting*. We're going to talk." That's basically what God is saying here.

You've got to think Aaron must be very uncomfortable with this, what's happening in the midst of this. Somehow he's aligned himself with Miriam, but Aaron is the one who heard God speak. He's the one who listened to Pharaoh say, "No, I'm not going to do this," but eventually change his mind and say, "You guys need to get out of here." Aaron watched Moses as Moses listened to the Lord and passed the word onto Aaron who would speak and be his mouthpiece. So Aaron has got to be a little uncomfortable here because Aaron knows that God speaks through Moses.

Verse 4 continues – *So the three of them went out. Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. You guys, come up here. When the two of them stepped forward, he said, "Listen to my words."* So He's going to rebuke them before He disciplines Miriam.

Listen to what He says. "*When there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face (literally it's mouth to mouth. In other words, just close by), clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"*

In other words what He's saying is, "What are you thinking?" That's what the dad is saying here to these siblings who are complaining about their brother. "What are you thinking?"

Verse 9: *The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left them. When the cloud lifted from above the tent, Miriam's skin was leprous.*

The word *leprosy* in the Old Testament refers to all kind of skin diseases. Not just Hansen's disease that we have in the modern times. That's what we call leprosy is Hansen's disease. But this refers to any kind of skin disease. So when it says *leprous*, her skin was *white as snow*. She had sores all over her body.

*Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had a defiling skin disease.* Now Aaron, of course, would know about defiling skin diseases because according to the law when someone had a skin disease of any kind they had to go to the priest and the priest would say, "Yep, that's a skin disease. You need to be put outside the camp until the skin disease is gone and then you can come back. But first you have to come back to me and I will look at it, and if it's gone then I will allow you back into the camp." So the priests were the gatekeepers, in essence, for public health for someone who had a skin disease.

So Aaron is looking at this going, "Oh my goodness! I know what this means. That means she can't be in her home anymore. She can't be around the tent anymore. She's got to go outside the camp." And that's a ways away. Remember we're talking about a couple million people in a huge camp. She's got to be outside the camp. This is really hard.

*Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had a defiling skin disease, and he said to Moses, "Please, my lord."*

I'm going to stop right there. Do you see now that Aaron is calling him *my lord*. We have a change of heart it appears in Aaron. Aaron now is saying, "Moses, I know you're the one. I'm coming to you." He doesn't go straight to God (isn't that interesting?) saying, "God, take this away." He goes straight to Moses because he knows that Moses has the relationship with God that is special.

I think this happens in our lives sometimes. You'll be sharing the gospel with people, you'll be taking a stand for Jesus, and some people will be putting that off and they'll be saying, "Forget her. Forget her. She's always talking about God." And then they have a problem in their life and they say, "Hey, would you pray for me?" Who do they go to? They go to the person that they know is connected to God.

That's why it's important for us to share with other people, not just having this as a secret. God's desire is that all kinds of people come to know Him. He has given us the opportunity to be a part of that process, that we're the ones who share the message with other people, we're the ones who pass that message on. There are people waiting to hear the gospel who need the gospel of Jesus Christ because it's through Jesus Christ alone that we experience healing in our own hearts.

A person with anxiety needs Jesus. A person with anger issues needs Jesus. A person who has money problems needs Jesus. Jesus is the answer to people's problems. But some people don't realize that and they have to come across the same piece of information over and over again before they say, "Okay, that's what I want. I want Jesus."

It's very interesting to hear the process through which God brings people to come to know Him. It's just fascinating to watch people come to Jesus. It's not our job to save people. It's God's job to save people. It's our job just to reveal God's work so that people can see it, so that people can move forward.

*"Please, my lord, I ask you not to hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away."*

*So Moses cried out to the Lord (he loves his brother and his sister), "Please, God, heal her!"*

*Verse 14: The Lord replied to Moses, "If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back."*

Why seven days, I was thinking. Was it because God needed to settle down? I doubt it. Is it because God's forgiveness takes a long time? No. But I think sometimes the process of change in our heart takes a bit of time. I think Miriam needed seven days to kind of work this out and come to a place where she was willing to listen to God through Moses and be able to understand that. Seven days.

I think about Jonah who was given a task. Go to Nineveh. But he ran the other way and God says, "Okay, I'm going to have to discipline this guy." He was in a fish for three days. I don't know if it would take me three days to repent. I think I'd be really quick. That would be a scary experience to be confined in a fish for three days. But when he repents the Lord had the fish throw up and then Jonah went and did the right thing.

I think about David when he sinned with Bathsheba the penalty was, or the punishment or discipline, the consequence was that the baby died. But the Bible tells us that after the prophet says the baby's going to die, it took seven days for the baby to die. Seven days. David was with that baby for seven days the Bible said. Why? Because God had to do something in David's heart to prepare him to obey the Lord in his life.

Man, I don't want it to take me seven days. I don't want it to take me forty years wandering around in the wilderness. I want to serve the Lord now. If God's indicating to me, "Scott, you need to do something in your life," I want to respond to the whispers of God. I don't want to have to wait till some big paddle comes along. I want to respond right away. Because I know that God is powerful. I know that God loves me. I know that God disciplines me because He loves me and He wants to move me forward in my life.

Seven days outside the camp. Verse 15: *So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back.*

Do you see that her sin, her problem, her correction affected other people? That's sad. But it happens. When someone in your family does the wrong thing, other people suffer for it. It's difficult. That's what's happening here. Everybody had to wait for Miriam to catch up, for her to be disciplined.

Verse 16: *After that, the people left Hazeroth and encamped in the Desert of Paran.* That's the end of chapter 12. Wow. What an interesting passage.

Does God speak to you? Because if He speaks to you, He's speaking to you for a reason. Not just to guide your life, but so you can share that with other people.

God speaks to me. He speaks to me through my wife. When my wife speaks, I listen. I've learned that over the years. I didn't always do that. But when she speaks, I listen. Because God speaks through my wife to teach me something or to guide me or to protect me from things.

God speaks to me through you folks. So if you say to me, "Scott, I think you should consider this," I listen. Because I know that God has placed the Holy Spirit in you and maybe God is speaking through you to me, so I want to be listening to that. God speaks to me through other people.

God speaks to me through the Holy Spirit in my own heart. That's why that presence is so important. Lord, I just pray that your presence, the Holy Spirit, would speak to me, teach me, guide me inside my own heart. And when He does, I want to listen to that.

And God speaks to me through His word. So I regularly want to be in His word so I can hear what He has to say, and then I have something to share with other people.

Sometimes the sharing is in our own families. Sometimes it's outside of our families. Sometimes it's just being a lighthouse for Jesus. Wow. I just think it's such a powerful thing when we are that kind of a person. Because you never know how someone is going to come to know Jesus.

That's why I want you to hear Debora share her testimony right now. Debora got saved recently and she's getting baptized today. I said, "Would you prepare a testimony to share at the baptism?" She wrote her testimony out and shared it with me, and I said, "You've got to share this on Sunday morning." So I want you to hear how Debora got saved.

Debora, come on up and share that with us.

[Debora] For those of you who don't know me, my name is Debora and I'm recently a Christian. Although I grew up in a very religious small town in rural Pennsylvania, I had no real Christian instruction whatsoever. As a youth I went to church as a non-Christian a few times, but honestly I was bored to death. I always thought that if I suffer from insomnia, I'd get a pastor to come talk to me. I'd fall right asleep. (Sorry, Scott!)

I had a happy childhood. My parents raised me with a very strong moral compass, yet they weren't Christian. I wasn't abused in any way. As a kid, yeah, you're bullied a little in school, but seriously who's not? In fact, I had a really great life.

I was paid to go to college. I was paid to go to grad school. I ended up with three bachelor's, two master's, and a PhD, and got a paycheck at the end of it. Pretty lucky there, right? I got to study abroad for two and a half years and work abroad as well.

I worked very well in my field, but I changed my career and started my own business, which went really well. I won several sales awards as well. I even took some national titles athletically.

I'm not saying all this to boast; I'm saying it because my life was great as a non-Christian. I didn't have any suffering really. Nothing too terrible. And this world just rewarded me again and again. I worked with all my might to win this world's favor and I did it. The world was handing me accolades left and right. I felt invincible.

I'm not saying that I just sat around and did nothing. I worked fourteen hours a day to found my own business, to win national titles. I was hit by a car. I had my legs reconstructed. I started a business from scratch. Yet no challenge I ever faced was strong enough or hard enough for me to seek any religious counseling, any guidance. I even lost one of my best friends. Didn't steer me towards God, not at all.

Looking back, I can really see how clearly God had been pursuing me. He pursued me with seemingly endless amount of patience and persistence. In fact, He had waited for me for almost fifty years. That's a long time. But until I understood that I actually needed a Savior, that I

needed a way out from temptation and sin, that I needed a life free from doubt and anxiety, that I needed a life that was even more than worldly accolades, I would never need Christ.

I came across that challenge at age 39. Let me just say I married the wrong man. Alcoholism, unemployment, infidelity, and theft were quick to surface...after the wedding. But my pride kept me from finding Christ. I had never failed at anything in my entire life. Not anything at all. I was at a crossroads. While my career and competitive life soared, my marriage was a pit of doubt and anxiety.

Then it happened. One of my best friends, Stephanie, and I compete in absolutely everything. If I deadlift 210 pounds, she will certainly deadlift 215. If she jumps over twelve risers, I will work until I can jump over thirteen.

Stephanie's Catholic and she celebrates Lent. So she decided to give up her two favorite things: peanut M&M's and pre-workouts. What can you say? She's an athlete. So you know I had to outdo her. I could not let her get the best in this one either.

So I thought for a little while, what could I give up? I decided I was going to give up doubts. This in combination with listening to a Christian radio station led me to Christ. And no, I have no idea why I started listening to 99.1. The CD player in my car broke. I was listening to Rammstein at the time. Those who don't know the group, you ought to listen to the lyrics in German. But I continued to listen to 99.1 even as a nonbeliever.

I quickly realized that I needed some help to conquer fear and doubt, that I needed to set aside my pride, that I needed to trust that someone would help me to find the right direction. Not only the right direction, but the righteous direction. That someone would protect me from the temptation of sins. And it happened. I stopped doubting and God was there. I began viewing hardships and temptation in life as probably the most awesome of the keys to Christian growth and maturity. Through my personal challenges I grew and I continue to grow in my love, my joy, my kindness, my humility, my patience, and faith.

I did the Bible study with Scott (which, by the way, I highly recommend) and he had emphasized in Romans 5:3-5 that it helps to put suffering into perspective. Suffering produces endurance, which produces character, which produces hope. What we need most when experiencing suffering is hope. And God wants to produce hope in our lives.

By resisting and resenting difficult times in our lives we miss so many opportunities to work towards Christ's likeness. As with all endeavors in life, if we are unwilling to push through the discomfort, we will not grow as people, and in this case we will not grow as Christians. But when a non-Christian feels alone, defeated, and filled with doubt, he or she will be tempted by absolutely everything. But a Christian never feels alone or doubtful because God is always there. We grow in our faith to never doubt that God is for us and that He always has our best interests in heart.

I now understand and admire the immense courage it takes to follow and please God rather than follow and please the world. Although I've only started my Christian discipleship, I will study,

pray, meditate and work with all my might to help God, to learn about God, and the teaching of Christ.

Thank you for everyone for helping me on my journey. Thank you.

[Scott] Thank you. It will be a privilege to baptize you today. I hope you will come be a part of that this afternoon.

It's interesting to me to find out how people come to know Jesus. We get to be a part of that in many people's lives. You don't know who around you is searching. We don't know. We do know that our job is just to share with other people and watch God work. It's not my job to save people; it's my job just to be a lighthouse, just like you. And then we can say, "Wow. Our God saves. Our God saves people. He saves them not just by salvation, but He saves them from all the other things that go on." That's just such a mighty message.