

# BIBLE BRIEFING

## NUMBERS 12 - 14 “Coups & Committees”

### Introduction

Two things stalled and then stopped the spiritual progress of the children of Israel: A *coup* attempt, and a *committee* report.

1. In chapter twelve, Moses' sister and brother attempt a leadership coup. The march toward the Promised Land is halted for a week.
2. Then, in chapters thirteen and fourteen, the committee to spy out the land gives their report. The crossing into the Promised Land is stopped for thirty-eight years!

### Chapter Twelve – The Coup

Moses' sister, Miriam, was respected as a leader among God's people. After all, she had been used by God to save Moses' life when he was sent floating down the Nile River; and she was a prophetess who had led the Jewish women in praising God.

Sister Miriam is about to create some problems:

Numbers 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.  
Numbers 12:2 So they said, “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?” And the Lord heard *it*.  
Numbers 12:3 (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)

Aaron (Moses' brother) was involved; but three pieces of evidence seem to indicate that Miriam was the leader in this rebellion:

1. She is mentioned first – something unusual in itself.
2. The verb for “spoke” is in a feminine form.
3. Only Miriam is disciplined.

Miriam attacked Moses new wife. It's likely that his first wife, Zipporah, had died. He remarried a woman from "Ethiopia." As long as Moses did not marry a woman from Canaan, his marriage was acceptable to the Lord (Exodus 34:12-16).

Miriam attacked the wife. It's a common strategy of Satan. Attack the wife, or the children, and the ministry is weakened and could fail.

Truth is, this had nothing to do with Moses' wife. Miriam's real issue was her own selfishness: , "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" She was jealous that her little brother got all the press! And she felt threatened by the new distribution of spiritual leadership to seventy Elders. Aaron was certainly guilty; he was a follower – easily swayed.

Moses wisely left his defense to the Lord.

Numbers 12:4 Suddenly the Lord said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out.

Numbers 12:5 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.

Numbers 12:6 Then 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.

Numbers 12:7 Not so with My servant Moses;  
He *is* faithful in all My house.

Numbers 12:8 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?"

Numbers 12:9 So the anger of the Lord was aroused against them, and He departed.

Numbers 12:10 And 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.

Miriam and Aaron had their assigned ministries. They should have been content. God had chosen Moses. To keep sin from spreading, God acted swiftly in judgment.

Numbers 12:11 So 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.

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

Numbers 12:13 So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “Please heal her, O God, I pray!”

Numbers 12:14 Then 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*.”

Numbers 12:15 So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in *again*.

Numbers 12:16 And afterward the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran.

The rebellious person can hinder the progress of the entire congregation. They cannot move as God intends until the person is restored.

With the internal politics of leadership settled... It was time to take God at His Word and enter the Promised Land.

## Chapters Thirteen & Fourteen – The Committee

Numbers 13:1 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

Numbers 13:2 “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.”

Numbers 13:3 So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the command of the Lord, all of them men who *were* heads of the children of Israel.

Numbers 13:4 Now these *were* their names: **[from here through verse fifteen]** from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur;

Numbers 13:5 from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori;

Numbers 13:6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh;

Numbers 13:7 from the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph;

Numbers 13:8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun;

Numbers 13:9 from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu;

Numbers 13:10 from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi;

Numbers 13:11 from the tribe of Joseph, *that is*, from the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi;

Numbers 13:12 from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli;

Numbers 13:13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael;

Numbers 13:14 from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi;

Numbers 13:15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi.

Numbers 13:16 **[Read]** These *are* the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua.  
Numbers 13:17 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,  
Numbers 13:18 and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it *are* strong or weak, few or many;  
Numbers 13:19 whether the land they dwell in *is* good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit *are* like camps or strongholds;  
Numbers 13:20 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.  
Numbers 13:21 So they went up and spied out the land from the Wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath.  
Numbers 13:22 And they went up through the South and came to Hebron; Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak, *were* there. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)  
Numbers 13:23 Then they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole. *They also brought* some of the pomegranates and figs.  
Numbers 13:24 The place was called the Valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the men of Israel cut down there.

There is a debate among scholars and students of the Bible as to whether God wanted them to send the spies at all. Certainly God gave them permission, as we read in verses one through three. But we also read, in Deuteronomy 1:22 & 23,

Deuteronomy 1:22 “And every one of you came near to **me** and said, ‘Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.’

Deuteronomy 1:23 “The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from *each* tribe.”

This plan was formed by the people, then brought to Moses, who said, “The plan pleased **me** well.” Thus it may be that God gave them permission, but never really intended them to send in spies. I’m not sure we can finally decide. Hindsight shows the poor result of the spy mission. But hindsight can’t help you when you’re making decisions!

One thing I think we can understand is that there is a permissiveness about God. He will sometimes permit you to do something that is not really necessary or even helpful, if you so desire it. Jonah is a good

example. He found a boat headed away from Nineveh! God remains Sovereign, in control; His providence does not cancel your free will.

I mention this because sometimes people end up blaming God for their own choices. God permitted it; therefore, He caused it. No; God permitted you to follow your own free will and you chose badly.

Numbers 13:25 And they returned from spying out the land after forty days.  
Numbers 13:26 Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land.  
Numbers 13:27 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.

The twelve spies traveled about 500 miles during the forty days of their survey of Canaan, but they discovered nothing that God hadn't already told them! They already knew the names of the pagan nations that lived in the land, and that it was a good land and a rich land flowing with milk and honey. They saw the incredible fruit of the land and brought back a huge bunch of grapes for the people to see. They even visited Hebron, where the patriarchs of Israel were buried with their wives.

Did the reminder of the faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph encourage their own trust in God? For ten of the spies, the answer is "No."

Ten of the spies gave their opinion that Israel wasn't able to conquer the land because the cities were protected by high walls and there were giants in the land:

Numbers 13:28 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.  
Numbers 13:29 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."

True enough! The conquest of the Promised Land would involve battles. It was a walk of faith. This is why the Promised Land of

Canaan is not a picture of heaven. It represents your life of victory by walking by faith on earth.

Someone has defined a committee as “a group of people who individually can do nothing and collectively decide nothing can be done.”

Because they lacked faith, all the spies (except Caleb and Joshua) were discouraged at the prospect of entering the land and fighting the enemy, and their discouragement quickly spread throughout the camp. Doubt had turned into unbelief, and unbelief is rebellion against God

There’s a difference between unbelief and doubt. Unbelief is a matter of the will; it causes people to rebel against God and say, *“No matter what the Lord says or does, I will not believe and obey!”* Doubt, however, is a matter of the heart and the emotions; it’s what people experience when they waver between fear and faith. The doubter says, *“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”* God seeks to encourage doubters and help them believe, but all He can do with rebels is bring judgment.

It has well been said that faith is not believing in spite of evidence - that’s superstition - but obeying in spite of circumstances and consequences. How much more evidence did the people need that their God was able to defeat the enemy and give them their land? He defeated and disgraced all the false gods of Egypt, protected Israel, and provided for them on their pilgrim journey. God’s commandment is always God’s enablement, and to win the victory, His people need only trust and obey.

The minority of Caleb and Joshua boldly affirmed that the Lord was able to give His people victory because He was greater than any enemy:

Numbers 13:30 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.”

“At once.” We too often fail because we hesitate. Once you know something is right, and is God’s will, do it immediately.

It's always interesting how the same circumstances can be viewed differently depending upon your perspective. Faith mixed with fear sees defeat; faith overcoming fear brings victory. It's so important to gain and maintain a heavenly perspective on your earthly circumstances.

Numbers 13:31 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."

Numbers 13:32 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.

Numbers 13:33 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."

Yes, the enemy is "stronger than we are." *But he or it is not stronger than the Lord!* They had God's clear Word.

Note the emphasis on what they saw; on their "own sight." We are to walk by faith, not by sight.

Numbers 14:1 So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.

Numbers 14:2 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!

Numbers 14:3 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?"

Numbers 14:4 So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt."

Unbelief and discouragement are more contagious than faith. In some Churches, there can be one or two chronic complainers, and they can do plenty of damage. *Here there was an entire nation!*

When the child of God is in the will of God, there is no place for complaining, even if the circumstances are difficult. The will of God will never lead us where the grace of God can't provide for us or the power of God protect us. If our daily prayer is, "Thy will be done," and if we walk in obedience to God's will, then what is there to

complain about? A complaining spirit is evidence of an ungrateful heart and an unsundered will. By our grumbling, we're daring to say that we know more than God does about what's best for His people!

Numbers 14:5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

Numbers 14:6 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;

Numbers 14:7 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.

Numbers 14:8 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.'

Numbers 14:9 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."

Four men of faith sought the Lord and beseeched the people... But it was to no avail.

Numbers 14:10 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.

Numbers 14:11 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?"

Numbers 14:12 I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

They could try to shift the blame to Moses and the others all they wanted, but this was their fault. If you want to be a disciple; if you want to grow and mature; it's important you recognize blameshifting. It's usually not your husband... Or your wife... Or your boss... Or your pastor... Or the people... That are to blame. It's that you do not believe God.

God was serious. He was ready to strike them where they stood.

Numbers 14:13 And Moses said to the Lord: "Then the Egyptians will hear *it*, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them,

Numbers 14:14 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.

Numbers 14:15 Now *if* You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying,

Numbers 14:16 '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.'

Numbers 14:17 And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying,

Numbers 14:18 '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*.'

Numbers 14:19 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."

If I'm Moses... I'd say, "Go for it, God!" Our equivalent would be getting out of our circumstances and into something we think 'better.' Take the issue of divorce as an example: Two believers, without biblical grounds, get divorced. They even sometimes say, "It's better for our kids." Is it better for the character and glory of God? Don't unbelievers then say, "The Lord was not able?"

Numbers 14:20 Then the Lord said: "I have pardoned, according to your word;

Numbers 14:21 but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord -

Numbers 14:22 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,

Numbers 14:23 they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.

Numbers 14:24 But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.

Numbers 14:25 Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valley; tomorrow turn and move out into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea."

Numbers 14:26 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,

Numbers 14:27 "How long *shall I bear with* this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me.

Numbers 14:28 Say to them, 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you:

Numbers 14:29 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.

Numbers 14:30 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.

Numbers 14:31 But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised.

Numbers 14:32 But *as for you*, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness.

Numbers 14:33 And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness.

Numbers 14:34 According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, *namely* forty years, and you shall know My rejection.

Numbers 14:35 I the Lord have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.”

They acted like they wanted to die in the wilderness... And they accused God of killing their children. So God let them die, but He preserved and blessed their children! Be careful – God sometimes gives you what you want.

Moses led the world’s longest funeral march, and Caleb and Joshua watched their generation die.

Numbers 14:39 Then Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly.

Numbers 14:40 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!”

Numbers 14:41 And Moses said, “Now why do you transgress the command of the Lord? For this will not succeed.

Numbers 14:42 Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the Lord *is* not among you.

Numbers 14:43 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.”

Numbers 14:44 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.

Numbers 14:45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah.

Neither Moses nor the ark left the camp, the cloud didn’t move from

the tabernacle, and the silver trumpets didn't blow. Yet the makeshift army went out to do battle. Defeat was the only certainty.

## Conclusion

When God commanded them to go forward into the Promised Land they made a definite decision to disobey due to unbelief. The Lord *pardoned* them (Numbers 14:20), but He would not *permit* them to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:21-34).

The people repented and made an attempt to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:40-45). God still would not permit them to go in. They were defeated by their enemies and went on to live defeated lives for thirty-eight years in the desert.

Listen carefully: At Kadesh-Barnea the Jews had fallen away. God pardoned them but would not *permit* them to fully recover. It was now *impossible* for them to be *renewed* by their *repentance* to the a place prior to their refusal to enter the Promised Land.

Does that sound familiar?

Hebrews 6:4 For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,  
Hebrews 6:5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,  
Hebrews 6:6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.

**The Hebrew Christians were in exactly the same place spiritually!** God wanted them to go forward to maturity in their Christian lives. They wanted to return to Judaism. A return to Judaism was so serious a falling away that God warned them He would not permit them to fully recover. They could be pardoned and they would remain Christians. But it was one of those life-changing decisions whose consequences could never be completely undone. It would be impossible for them to be renewed to a place of real Christian maturity even if they were to repent.

There are one-time, life changing decisions that you can recover from, but never repent of. Premarital sex is a good example; there are many others.

Better to trust God, to take Him at His Word, that what He has in store for you is better – a Promised Land of blessing.