

Trouble in the Camp: Derailed by Dissension

Numbers 12:1-16

The children of Israel are on the verge of the Promised Land. They had sent in the 12 spies. 10 returned with an evil report and only two came back with a good report (Joshua and Caleb).

Numbers 14:1-4 And all the congregation **lifted up their voice**, and **cried**; and the people **wept** that night. (2) And all the children of Israel **murmured against Moses and against Aaron**: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! (3) And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? (4) And they said one to another, **Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt**.

As a result, the Israelites were denied entrance into the land of Promise and this generation was doomed to die off in the wilderness over the next 40 years. How did the Israelites get to this point?

Exodus 14:10-12 And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. (11) And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? (12) Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

Exodus 15:21 And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

Exodus 15:22 So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and **they went three days** in the wilderness, and found no water.

Exodus 15:24 And the **people murmured against Moses**, saying, What shall we drink?

Exodus 16:1-3 And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin,

which is between Elim and Sinai, on the **fifteenth day of the second month** after their departing out of the land of Egypt. (2) And the whole congregation of the **children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron** in the wilderness: (3) And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

Exodus 17:1-3 And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. (2) Wherefore **the people did chide with Moses**, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? (3) And the people thirsted there for water; and **the people murmured against Moses**, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?

Exodus 19:1-2 In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. (2) For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount.

Exodus 32:1 And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

Numbers 11:1 And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

Numbers 11:4-6 And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? (5) We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: (6) But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

It is in this background and in this context that we come to our main text in Numbers 12.

I. Criticism and dissension (against leadership) often come from many sources

Numbers 12:1 And **Miriam and Aaron** spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

Numbers 11:1 And when the **people** complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

Numbers 11:4 And the **mixt multitude** that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?

What are the sources of criticism and dissension?

- From enemies, outside, or fringe people
- From where you might least expect it
- From those who are closest to you
- From those who know you best
- From those who are friends and family

What is the nature of criticism and dissension?

- The criticism might have elements of truth
- The criticism does not have to be legitimate
- The criticism is often not the real reason for the complaint/dissension

It doesn't matter who the leader is:

- Moses was criticized
- David was criticized
- Paul was criticized (apostolic authority, motives, duality)
- Even Jesus was criticized (He was perfect/sinless)

Mark 3:21-22 And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, **He is beside himself.** (22) And the scribes which came

down from Jerusalem said, **He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils** casteth he out devils.

Mark 7:2 And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, **they found fault.**

Mark 7:5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not **thy disciples** according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?

Jesus was crucified by his own nation having been accused of blasphemy and insurrection.

If only I had a better husband, a different boss, a new pastor
No leader is perfect. There is no perfect leader – except Jesus Himself.

Numbers 12:1 And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses **because of the Ethiopian woman** whom he had married: for he had **married an Ethiopian woman.**

Who was the Ethiopian (Cushite) women?

- Zipporah (Exodus 2:21)
- A second wife while married to Zipporah
- A second wife after the death of Zipporah

But this does not seem to be the real reason for the criticism from Miriam and Aaron.

II. Criticism and dissension (against leadership) often reveal deep-seated resentment

Numbers 12:2 And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it.

The complaint against an Ethiopian wife seems to be a smokescreen masking the real issue (vs. 2)

The real reason: they were jealous
God had chosen Moses as the leader

Miriam and Aaron had become dissatisfied with that and discontent
They apparently became jealous of:

- They were older,
- Moses had set up 70 elders to help Moses with leadership (ch 11)

Hidden resentments are often the real root cause for our criticisms toward people.

- jealous of them , or
- prejudice against them for some reason, or
- they crossed our will in some way and made us angry.

Then because of these resentments in our heart, we align ourselves against that person.

- But we don't want to acknowledge that it's because of our resentment that we're opposed to that person so what do we do?
- We put them under the microscope and jump on whatever faults we can find in them so
- we can legitimize our opposition to them to ourselves and to other people.
- We become their biggest critics and
- we seek to convince others of the validity of our opposition to them.
- In this way, our criticisms become a smokescreen for the real issue – the sinful resentment that has built up in our own hearts.
- But our opposition to someone and our vehement criticisms against them are disproportionate to the persons actual or perceived faults.

We don't know who they grumbled to:

- They spoke about Moses in third person – indicates they were complaining to others and seeking to undermine his leadership/authority (vs 2)
- Moses seems to have heard about it third hand and chose not to do anything or defend himself (vs 3)
- This seems to be a various serious matter and could have been a disaster

Gossip = cancer

- Often goes undetected, is difficult to detect
- It tends to spread quietly and undetected
- Once detected, it is difficult to remove

III. Criticism and dissension (against leadership) often bring great displeasure to the Lord

Numbers 12:4-5 And the LORD spake **suddenly** unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, **Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation.** And they three came out. (5) And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth.

Numbers 12:9 And the **anger of the LORD was kindled against them;** and he departed.

Numbers 11:1 And when the people complained, **it displeased the LORD:** and the LORD heard it; and his **anger was kindled;** and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

Numbers 11:10 Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the **anger of the LORD was kindled greatly;** Moses also was displeased.

IV. Criticism and dissension (against leadership) often cause great harm and unintended consequences

Numbers 12:10 And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, **Miriam became leprous,** white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, **she was leprous.**

Numbers 12:14-15 And the LORD said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? let her be **shut out from the camp seven days,** and after that let her be received in again. (15) And Miriam was **shut out from the camp seven days:** and the people **journeyed not** till Miriam was brought in again.

Numbers 14:11-12 And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people **provoke me**? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? (12) I will **smite them with the pestilence**, and **disinherit them**, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.

Numbers 14:22-23 Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; (23) Surely they **shall not see the land** which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:

Numbers 14:27-33 How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which **murmur against me**? I have heard the **murmurings** of the children of Israel, which they **murmur** against me. (28) Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: (29) **Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness**; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have **murmured** against me, (30) Doubtless ye **shall not come into the land**, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. (31) But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. (32) But as for you, **your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness**. (33) And your **children shall wander in the wilderness forty years**, and bear your whoredoms, until your **carcasses be wasted in the wilderness**.

Philippians 2:14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings: