Numbers 12-14 • Criticism and Spies Sent Out

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As we get into Numbers chapter 12, which is where we are going to be picking it up tonight, we're going to be dealing with challenges that Moses came up against. And one of the first ones we're going to deal with in this chapter has to do with criticism—people being critical. Has anyone ever criticized you?

I can't relate. Actually, when I was, those couple few years when I was a basketball official, I learned all about criticism. I learned that every call you make on the floor, 50 percent of the people hate you. And you better deal with it or it's going to wipe you out. We could, we probably all remember a time when we've been criticized.

When was the last time, and I'm not asking for answers here, but when was the last time you were critical of someone else? Criticism is one of those interesting sort of dynamics. We're very astute at remembering the last time we were criticized, but we seem to have this ability to just completely forget the last time we were critical of someone else. And it's one of those very one-sided sort of things.

Anyway, beginning here in chapter 12 of Numbers, it says in verse 1, *"Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman." (ESV)*

In this chapter we're going to learn about a level of criticism that rose up against Moses by his own brother and sister. And since Miriam's name appears first—usually women's names didn't appear before a man's name back in those days—unless there was some significance to that order, unless she was prominent in some way.

Even in the New Testament, we see this as the case. We have Priscilla and Aquila that are mentioned in the New Testament, and sometimes Priscilla's name precedes her husband's, which leads us to believe that she was perhaps even the more dominant individual as it relates to ministry.

But in this case, we're going to learn as we go through the chapter that Miriam is the only individual between she and Aaron who actually suffers some punishment related to this act of backbiting or gossiping, criticizing—that's going on here.

And you'll notice it begins, or it says that it begins with an issue they had with Moses related to his Cushite wife. That wasn't what was really going on. Verse 2 tells us what is really going on.

And it says in verse 2, *"And they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it."*

Couple of things here I want to bring out. The root of this criticism that Miriam and Aaron are leveling against their brother—even though they're starting it on the basis of the fact that he'd taken a Cushite wife, and I'm not sure exactly, what taking a Cushite wife presented in the way of fodder for their criticism. I don't really know, nor does anyone else from what I can tell, but it just became a springboard.

Do you know how that often happens? Somebody will get angry or they'll have an issue with you or someone else, and they'll bring up something that really isn't the issue, but they use it to begin to just draw or make a case against the individual.

What is behind it, however, is what we see here in verse 2. And that is, they're telling people, who does Moses think he is? We're all from the same family. And essentially, they're—this is one of the worst sorts of things—it is all about jealousy and pride. That's what is behind this thing.

So think of that next time somebody criticizes someone in your hearing. What they're bringing up to you in the form of criticism that they're leveling may, in fact, not be the issue at all. It could be that they're jealous of this person, or angry at this person, or whatever the thing might be. But what they bring up to you is just a facade, if you will. So what's the response of Moses in this? If you've ever heard of someone who is criticizing you, you might even remember how you responded.

Look at verse 3. It says, *"Now the man Moses was very meek,* (Your Bible may say humble. And it says, in fact, he was) *more* (so) *than all people who were on the face of the earth."*

Now, I'm assuming that this is from God's Word a justifiable statement, because I'm not really sure how you would know otherwise if somebody was the most humble person on the face of the earth. I don't know. I don't think there's a test that you can give people quickly to find out whether you're humble or not.

However, we're going to take God's Word for it as it relates to this—that Moses was an incredibly humble man. And what that means essentially is, we're being told his response to the thing, which is basically nothing. That's what humility

does. When somebody criticizes you, humility responds by just going, huh? Whatever.

What is it that causes us to get our back up, or to become angry in return, or even to say things back in return? Yeah, well what about them? I remember a time when— you start going back and doing all that stuff, and pretty soon, you got this Twitter war going on between two people. Right? And we get to all listen in while these two people criticize one another over social media.

Excuse me for bringing it into the future or into the present rather, maybe it won't be part of the future. Wouldn't that be wonderful? But the point is, what causes us to shoot back is pride—because my pride has been wounded. You said something against me. You defamed me. I'm not going to stand for that.

How do you respond when you're criticized? How about when somebody at work—you find out that somebody criticized you in front of the boss, and it was unfounded, it was unfair, and you know that person just had it out for you. How do you respond?

Well, it depends. It depends on whether you're humble or prideful. If you're prideful, you're going to shoot back. If you're humble—and Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth, we're told—he's not going to respond.

And it goes on to say, oh, and by the way, there was one other thing I wanted to bring out about this, and it's really at the very end of verse 2. Again, we see what Miriam was essentially saying: *"...Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?..."* And then that last line—you got to love that—*"....And the LORD heard it."*

And that's really the problem, isn't it? Whenever you say something against someone else, you can't say it—and even though you might say it to somebody and go, now listen, don't tell anybody I told you this, but…and then you give them this little juicy morsel—here's the point: God hears it. God hears it. God hears it.

And it says in verse 4, *"And suddenly the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting."* (He might just as well have said the woodshed, because that's what's going on here.) *And the three of them came out.* [5] *And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward.* [6] *And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream.* [7] *Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house.* [8] *With him I speak mouth to mouth* (We would say face to face today. And if you have more of a dynamic translation that you're reading here today, yours probably does say) *face to face,*

The idea here is without a middleman, or without means of a method beyond just verbal communication. He says), *clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD.* (We know it's not the form of the Lord in His glory. We know that because Moses actually asked to see the Lord like that and was turned down. But he sees some form, and then He goes on to say) *Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"*

You see, the basis of the criticism of Moses was, what's so special about him? That's what they were basically saying to the rest of the people, where…what's so special about Moses? I'm Miriam. She was saying, I'm his sister. Aaron here is his brother. We were born of the same parents. We got this all the same DNA. We're equal. And in a true sense of the term, they were, but what they were saying was, what's so special about Moses?

And isn't it interesting that God pulls him aside into the tent of meeting and He explains what's so special about Moses? And basically it's this: Listen, when I come to speak to people, I don't speak directly to them in the sense that I do to Moses. I either do through a dream or a vision or whatever. Not Moses. I talk to him face to face. Since I treated your brother that way, why were you not afraid to speak against him?

And it tells us here in verse 9, that *"...the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed. 10 When the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, like snow…"*

Now you've heard me say several times that the word for leprosy in the Old Testament actually covered a host of potential skin diseases, some infectious, some not. But this one appears to be talking specifically about leprosy, because this is what often a person with leprosy looks like—in this white, crusty sort of a skin condition. And just like that, Miriam was covered with leprosy.

And it says that *"...Aaron turned toward Miriam, and behold, she was leprous. 11 And Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord, do not punish us because we have done foolishly and have sinned. 12 Let her not be as one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes out of his mother's womb."*

And basically he's saying, let her not be like a stillborn child that has not been developed or even has been decomposing even while it was in its mother's womb.

And it says in verse 13, *"And Moses cried to the LORD, "O God, please heal her—please.""*

I'm just amazed, because there's a part of all of us that probably thinks that maybe Moses ought to say, hey, this is God's deal. I didn't make Miriam

leprous. I don't have the ability to do that. That was God. Maybe you guys need to talk to God. Maybe you guys need to get your act together. Maybe you guys—whatever the situation might be. Moses immediately begins to cry out in intercession for his sister.

But look what the Lord says, verse 14: *"But the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut outside the camp seven days, and after that she may be brought in again." 15 So Miriam was shut outside the camp seven days, and the people did not set out on the march till Miriam was brought in again. 16 After that the people set out from Hazeroth, and camped in the wilderness of Paran.*

So, this is a fascinating chapter. But among other things, it reminds us of just the danger of what we do with our mouths. We are given these mouths to praise God with, and we use them too often to speak ill of brothers and sisters in Christ and others.

And even though the nation of Israel wasn't used to following a national leader like they've been doing Moses, they'd been under Pharaoh, but they didn't really recognize him as a leader. They'd been under his thumb more or less. And this is all very new to them—to have this individual like Moses. But that's no excuse.

Often what happens when we are confronted with our own criticism is that we don't stop to consider our motives. Our criticism has a way of blinding us to why we're being critical in the first place.

And oh, by the way, sometimes what you and I call constructive criticism is just another name for I want to get you. I want to make sure and knock you down a peg sort of a thing.

And why do we do that? We do it because somebody has something, or is something, that we want or that we think they don't deserve. And so we begin to level criticism in their direction in order to knock them down and elevate ourselves. That's the bottom line behind criticism.

That's what was going on with Miriam and Aaron. What's the big deal with Moses? Doesn't God speak to all of us? Aren't we all special in His eyes? and so forth. We become jealous of people, right? I mean, that's often what's in back of it all. So we criticize them.

I want to show you a passage from James—probably, in the New Testament, talks more about the tongue than anybody. This is from the New Living Translation because I like the way they say it:

James 4:11 (NLT)

Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you.

Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you.

Now, the New Living Translation (NLT) is a very loose translation, and you can look that up in your own Bible and you can read it and see—unless you have a New Living Translation—but you can see what your Bible has to say. This communicates the gist of what I think God is trying to say to us whenever we begin to speak a word of criticism against Christ—others.

Here's the point, though. Sometimes we do actually come across a leader who is genuinely wrong. And there are times that God will actually give you insight into what's going wrong in the organization of which you're a part.

Women, it could be your husband, and the Lord might give you insight into the fact that he is actually wrong in what he's doing. And women are very perceptive—I have come to learn—about those sorts of things.

Now, it might be a workplace situation. Maybe you're just close enough to what's going on in the administrative level at your job that you're privy to some of the decisions that are made. And they're not good decisions. In fact, they're wrong decisions.

And God makes you aware. That could even be a situation at church where you're part of a ministry, or you see something that I do, and you don't feel it's right or whatever.

Sometimes God gives us insights, and your insights are not wrong. Your insights are in fact correct. And the other person is in the wrong.

Now, what are you going to do about that? Because that's it. That's what the big deal is here. That’s what should be important to you and I—how am I going to respond?

How am I going to respond with what I know to be true related to this thing? Again—family, business, church, ministry in church or whatever—it's how we respond to what we are shown that makes all the difference.

And we need, obviously, God's wisdom and discernment to know how to react to what we see. But I'll tell you one thing God doesn't want you to do. God does

not want you to respond with a critical spirit. I can tell you that absolutely—100 percent. Don't respond with a critical spirit.

But it's very easy to do that, isn't it? Especially when you're the one on the short end of the stick regarding those decisions that are being made. It might be actually getting the raw end of the deal.

There's a great passage to keep in mind. It's from Ecclesiastes chapter 5, verse 2. Check this out—NIV:

Ecclesiastes 5:2 (NIV84)

Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. (In other words, in the hearing of God.) *God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.*

Isn't that great? If we all followed this passage, this would be a whole different world that we would live in. Basically it's saying: He's God. You're not. Don't talk. Or talk just very little.

I forget who said this, but Sue and I—one of the things we used to say to our kids while they were growing up, and I don't remember where we learned it—we used to say that there's a lot of things going on in this world, and very little of it is your business.

And it was just a good reminder to like, don't get all whacked out about stuff. Just chill. And be careful that you don't become, as we read there in Ecclesiastes, hasty in your heart. In other words, that means quick in your heart—to respond, to let it come out of your mouth.

Oh, we need to learn to put a muzzle. And I respond the way I do when I say those things because I'm convicted in my own life. Just spilling out a response to a situation. Because some of us—okay, I won't include you.

As a teacher, I tend to see things in a fairly black-and-white sort of way. I mean, that's just the way it is. It's the way God wired me. And my response is often in a similar sort of way. But it can be very biting and very hurtful—very damaging, I've learned. What I say from my mouth can be extremely damaging to people's tender hearts.

And I so have to remember that when I'm feeling something about a situation. Because some of us can feel things quite intensely and passionately. And our

words can be just as intense, just as passionate, but multiple times more hurtful. Important reminders.

Alright, Numbers chapter 13. Alright, now as we approach the 13th chapter of Numbers, we're going to find that the nation of Israel finally reaches their destination. They've come to the land of promise. The question is: will they have faith in God?

"The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [2] *"Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them.""*

Now, it sounds very much from this verse that this was all God's idea—to send these spies into the land. But if you go into the book of Deuteronomy, where Moses is recounting all of this to the nation of Israel prior to them truly going into the land—and really just before his death—Deuteronomy is his pastoral swan song. It was his last message before he died, and then Joshua took them into the land.

As Moses is recalling this event that you and I are reading about here in Numbers, he actually tells them in Deuteronomy that the people suggested they send spies. Isn't that interesting? That the people suggested they send the spies.

Now, I think what happened is Moses, being the good leader he was, he took it to the Lord and he said, Lord, the people would have me send in spies to check out the land. (Deuteronomy 1:22–23)

And I think that Numbers gives us the response of the Lord: Go ahead and do it. Go ahead and do it, because I believe the Lord was using this situation to test their faith—because of course, He knew what the spies were going to find: a land truly flowing with milk and honey, but some pretty imposing and intimidating dudes that they were also going to locate there in the Promised Land.

And God wanted to test them—to see how they would respond. Would they respond in faith, or would they respond in fear? I don't believe this was originally God's idea. It was the people's idea, and God said, alright, go ahead and give it to them. Let them go.

So it says in verse 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 people of Israel."* [4] *And these were their names:..."*

Ladies, if you're thinking of having more babies, go ahead and just run through those, but I'm not going to read them. Skip. It's just a bunch of names.

Skip down to verse 16: *"These were the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua."*

Now this is really interesting, isn't it? We're in the midst of this story of the coming to the land, and we have this interesting verse in 16 that tells us that Moses gave Joshua a name upgrade. And he went from Hoshea to Joshua. Pretty interesting, isn't it?

Well, you'll notice that both names sound very similar. They're even more similar than you might even know. But the meanings are also very similar. Hoshea means salvation. And what he upgraded him to was Yahushua, which means the Lord is salvation, or Yahweh is salvation, or it could even be Yahweh saves. Okay? From Hoshea to Yahushua —or Joshua—which is the same name that is translated Jesus when we give it a Greek slant, if you will.

And God doesn't do anything by accident. We've talked about all the types and shadows that are given to us in the Old Testament. This is one of many. Who is the man who brought the nation of Israel into the land of promise? It was Yahushua —Joshua—meaning Yahweh is salvation. And he is the type. He is a shadow, if you will, of Jesus, who takes us into the victory of God—who brings us into the victory that is ours in Christ Jesus—because the Promised Land is a picture of walking in the victory of God. It's walking out the promises of God.

We've talked before that the Promised Land is not a picture of heaven. It's a picture of walking out the promises of God. It's what we're doing today, hopefully, as believers. Hopefully, you've come out of the wilderness, and you're walking in the Promised Land. You're walking among the promises of God. And you're trusting Him.

But what that means is: there's all kinds of battles too. There's all kinds of enemies. There's all kinds of problems. We'll get into that when we get into the book of Joshua.

But so we have this interesting sidestep—this interesting word given to us regarding Joshua's name.

Verse 17 goes on and says: *"Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan and said to them, "Go up into the Negeb and go up into the hill country, [18] and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, [19] and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, [20] and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land." Now* (it says, in fact that this was) *the time was the season of the first ripe grapes.*

[21] So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath. [22] They went up into the Negeb and came to Hebron. Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) [23] And they came to the Valley of Eshcol and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them; they also brought some pomegranates and figs. [24] That place was called the Valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster that the people of Israel cut down from there.

[25] At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. [26] And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people 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. [27] And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. [28] However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. [29] The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan."

[30] But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." [31] Then 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 are." [32] So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. [33] And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

Chapter 14:

"Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. [2] And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses (more criticism) *and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! [3] Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" [4] And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." [5] Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel. [6] And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes [7] and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "The land, which we passed through to*

spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. [8] *If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey.* [9] *Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them."* [10] *Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel."*

Isn't that crazy? The Lord even had to rescue these men who were telling the people to trust in God because they wanted to become violent and just kill them. Kill them! Get rid of these guys! We're going back to Egypt. They made up their minds. We're going back.

Remember people, Egypt is a picture of slavery to sin. It's a picture of the world and within the context of the world, we are in slavery to our sinful passions. And the people are saying, in essence, we want to go back. We want to go back and be slaves. We want to go back to the world. This is too hard. God is not with us. God's not going to take care of us. God's not going to protect us. This is too difficult. So God had to appear at the tent of meeting and rescue these men.

Verse 11 says, *"And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?* [12] *I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you* (a greater and, excuse me) *a nation greater and mightier than they."*

Do you see what God is saying to Moses here? He's basically saying, alright, fine, I've had it up to here with these crybabies. I'm just going to, I'm going to start over again with you, Moses. Start with you. Your family, your children, we'll start, we'll make a whole new nation. But these people I'm just going to get rid of. That's what He's saying.

Verse 13: *"But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for you brought up this people in your might from among them,* [14] *and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.* [15] *Now if you kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard your fame will say,* [16] *'It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.'* [17] *And now, please let the power of the Lord be great as you have promised, saying,* [18] *'The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in*

steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.' [19] *Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now."*

Wow. This is a powerful piece of intercession. Moses is turning down the opportunity to have a nation built from his own family. These people have been bugging him, too. I'm surprised Moses didn't just say, yeah, I think that might be a good idea. But rather than do that, he appeals to God on the basis of what? God's reputation. That's the basis of his appeal.

Well, it's part of the basis. We'll talk about the rest in just a moment. The basis of the appeal is, he begins by saying, yeah, but God, think about it. Now, he's not telling God something he doesn't know. But he says, the Egyptians, they know what all you did. They know you delivered your people with a mighty hand from Egypt. They know. That you brought them out into the wilderness and that you were heading for a land that they would call their own. They know that. Now, if you kill all these people here, they're going to say, God wasn't able.

Do you get what Moses is doing here? He cares about God's reputation. His prayer, his appeal to God to act graciously, mercifully, is based upon God's reputation. I have to ask something of us. Today, how much do we care about God's reputation? How much do we care? How much or how many of the decisions that we make that we allow other people to see, we put it all out there.

How many of those decisions reflect well on the Lord or the things that we decide to do? Or how many of our decisions reflect very poorly on the God that you serve? When people look at your life and when they look at your decisions. The things that you choose to lay hold of or let go of or say in the hearing of others.

What are you saying about God? And when you pray for someone or about a situation, are you caring about how people will perceive God in the midst of that situation? I'm, I'll be honest with you. Most of the time when we Christians pray, we're praying about how it affects me, God praying about this, because, you know, because I don't want to be without. I don't want to go through hardship.

I like the fact that Moses holds God to a standard of taking care of His people so that His name won't be dragged through the mud.

Have you ever stopped to think about if you're, for example, if you're out of a job, okay, you're unemployed, you're And you start, you're praying about it. You're just praying and saying, Lord, I need a job. But see, that's the extent of our prayer, Lord, I need a job, right?

When's the last time somebody prayed, Lord, everybody knows that I'm a believer. I mean, the people, I know a lot of folks that know that I'm yours. I'm your son/I'm your daughter. Whatever the case may be. So Lord, on the basis of, I don't want anybody to ever look at my life and think, wow, his God or her God doesn't take care of them. Lord, because of your name, and that your name might never be seen in a dim light, I pray in Jesus name that you would provide this job.

Isn't that an interesting way to pray? Isn't that an interesting sort of a perspective to take on the whole thing? Rather than being so completely self-centered, and self-directed in our prayers, but to care about Lord, what is your reputation going to suffer based on this thing? That is the essence of it.

Now, it's not the only basis on which Moses bases his intercession. He goes on to hold God to His word. Did you notice in verse 18 he actually quotes the Lord? Did you catch that? What is he quoting here? He's quoting what the Lord told him when He revealed himself to Moses. Here's what would happen.

Moses was up on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments and all that stuff. And he spent all that time with God. Forty days, came down, got upset with everybody for the golden calf thing. Went back up to the mountain another forty days. It says that while he was there, he said to the Lord, if I found favor in your sight, you guys remember? Let me see your face. I want to see your face.

God said, you can't see my face and live. Here's what I'll do. I'll hide you in the cleft of the rock. I'll put my hand over you while I pass by. And then I'll let you see the trailing edge of my glory. That's as close as you can come to see me without absolutely frying where you stand. Right? So he says, I'll only let you see that much. And it says, while God passed by, and His hand was over Moses, hidden in the rock, it says God declared himself. Isn't that interesting? He declared himself. (Exodus 33–34)

And Moses quotes it here. Verse 18. In fact, if you start in verse 17, he says, *"...let the power of the Lord be great, as you have promised, saying, [18] 'The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression…"* He said, you know, my God, you told me that. When you

passed by, you declared yourself to be slow to anger, abounding in love, forgiving iniquity and transgression. That's what you said.

What I love about this? Moses is holding God to His word, and we Christians need to do that. Do not ever be afraid to hold God to His word. He delights to have his children have the gumption to say, God, you promised it. I'm standing on it.

So often, we respond like the people of Israel coming to the border of the promised land. God made promises. We choose not to believe it. God told them. He gave them the land. I'm giving you the land. Well, what does that mean? I brought you here to die at the hands of these people? Obviously not. If God gave, I mean, if these people just would have thought it through. God gave us the land. Well, obviously He means for us to be successful in taking the land right and ousting the peoples who are living there.

But see, that takes trust. I have to trust in God's promise. I have to trust in God's character and I have to hold him to His word. God, I'm holding you to your word. It's scary. Have you ever faced a situation that was frightening, and you just told God, this is frightening, this is scary, but you know what, I'm holding you to your word. You said, right, and then you lay it out, you lay out the promises of God.

Christians, we need to learn to do this. Standing on the promises. It's what it's called. Learning to stand on the promises of God. First of all, know the promises of God. And then lay hold of them, and then hold God to them.

Listen, you don't need to appeal to God, or prevail upon God to hold Him to His promises. I don't mean to make it sound like you have to argue with Him in order to get Him to be faithful. What I'm saying to you is, God delights to be faithful. And He longs for His children to base their prayers and appeals on His promises, So that He has the opportunity to show you His incredible faithfulness, but that's what Moses is showing us an example of in this passage.

Did you notice also, he says in verse 19, if you look with me again, please, in verse 19: *"Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to* (how much they love you. Doesn't say that, does it? It's basically according to the greatness of Your love) *the greatness of your steadfast love…"* Just as you've forgiven them from the very beginning of when you set them free from Egypt until now I want you to forgive them now as well. He's appealing on the basis of God's love.

Can I just encourage you—and this will energize your prayer—when you're praying for people, whether you're praying for them to be healed of some physical issue or you're praying for a provision of some other kind or whatever you're praying about, appeal to God on the basis of His love. Just say, Lord, according to Your great love, do this thing for them.

So many times we want to build a case with God where this person really deserves to have whatever we're asking of Him for them, right?

It's like, Lord, they've been faithful to You. Or they've been—boy, they've been good. This is a good—this guy is a nice guy! This guy hardly ever has a bad word to say about anybody, and you know that God. So Lord, I'm just praying right now. No, no, no. See, that's the wrong basis to ask for things from.

Do it on the basis of God's love—on His mercy, His steadfast love. Lord, according to Your steadfast love, I ask You to move powerfully in this situation. According to Your mercy. When you're praying for the unsaved, pray according to God's mercy. God, I ask You in the name of Jesus to be merciful to this individual. And I'm literally basing my prayer on the fact that You are a God who delights to show mercy—not because they deserve it or they've merited an answer at all. It's based on the love of God.

Listen, I want to show you here as we read on how God responds to this kind of audacity from human beings who will hold God to His word—even quoting His word back to Him and saying, hey God, You said it, I didn't. Right?

Look what He says in verse 20: *"Then the LORD said, "I have pardoned, according to your word.* (Isn't that beautiful? He says,) *21 But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, 22 none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, 23 shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it. 24 But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it. 25 Now, since the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valleys, turn tomorrow and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea."*

26 And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 27 "How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumblings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. 28 Say to them, 'As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: 29 your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness,…"

Remember they said that? It would have been better for us just to die in the wilderness. That's what they said. And He goes, okay, you got it. Be careful what you ask for.

He says, *"...and of all your number,* (I'm in the middle of verse 29) *listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, [30] not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. [31] But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected."*

Remember they said, our babies are going to die, they're going to die, they're going to be killed? And God said, fine. You're going to drop in the wilderness. I'll bring your kids in. The ones you said would die in the wilderness—I will protect them, and I will bring them into the land that I promised to your forefathers.

Verse 32: *"But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. [33] And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. [34] According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.' [35] I, the LORD, have spoken. Surely this will I do to all this wicked congregation who are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall come to a full end, and there they shall die."*

[36] And the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing up a bad report about the land— [37] the men who brought up a bad report of the land—died by plague before the LORD. [38] Of those men who went to spy out the land, only Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive." So their judgment was immediate.

[39] When Moses told these words to all the people of Israel, the people mourned greatly. [40] And they rose early in the morning and went up to the heights of the hill country, saying, "Here we are. We will go up to the place that the LORD has promised, for we have sinned." [41] But Moses said, "Why now are you transgressing the command of the LORD, when that will not succeed? [42] Do not go up, for the LORD is not among you, lest you be struck down before your enemies. [43] For there the Amalekites and the Canaanites are facing you, and you shall fall by the sword. Because you have turned back from following the LORD, the LORD will not be with you." [44] But they presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, although neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed out of the camp. [45] Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived

in that hill country came down and defeated them and pursued them, even to Hormah."

Wow. Crazy. Wild story. They presumed even to go up against these enemies, even after their great disobedience. You know what? Sometimes it's too late. Sometimes it's too late, and you just got to take your medicine. But they weren't willing to accept that. So we have this whole situation of the nation of Israel coming to the border of the Promised Land and just foolishly casting it aside in their fear.

I have to make a connection to us today, because I think there's a needful connection that we need to consider here as we wind down. We live in a society today where we're constantly being warned about foolishly taking risks. I mean, good grief, we live in a society where if I don't buckle up my seatbelt, they can pull me over and give me a fine. I mean, that might be smart from the standpoint of, like, saving people from their stupidity. And I firmly believe it's a smart idea to put on your seatbelt. Don't get me wrong. Wear your seatbelt.

But when the government comes along and says, we're going to force you to take care of yourself, and then at the same time—live in Idaho—it's like, yeah, sure, ride your motorcycle without a helmet. We don't care. So there's a lot of this weirdness going on. But still, we're warned in some areas against taking some foolish risks.

And the amount of money we spend on insurance is absolutely amazing—property insurance, life insurance, auto insurance, and all kinds of different sorts of insurance. We're encouraged to make sure our resources aren't going to go away. We're encouraged to save our resources.

Hey, you own a house? Insure it. I mean, the bank won't let you get a loan without it. Got to have a homeowner's policy or we're not going to give you a loan. And I get that. I get the whole point behind that. But again, this is preached to us and we just accept it.

And what is preached to us is: Don't take risks. Be very careful. Don't take risks. And while that might be very prudent advice in some areas of life—people, can I just say this?

When it comes to the kingdom of God, it has a completely different effect on the lives of believers. This mentality that we take from our society into the kingdom of God, that causes us to gravitate toward this idea of a safe and comfortable lifestyle...

Do you guys understand that in the context of God's kingdom, stepping out in faith rarely looks safe and rarely looks prudent? It usually looks stupid, and

you'll even have people in your life who will tell you, that's dumb, just like these spies who came back, and they probably sounded very reasonable.

It's like, wow, this is great land. Here's some of the fruit. God was right—flowing with milk and honey. The whole nine yards. Let me tell you something. This is a huge risk that we're taking because these people are big. And there is no way on God's green earth we're going to overwhelm these people and be able to—and I'm sure there were a lot of people who heard that and went, yeah, that sounds right. Sounds logical. Sounds reasonable. You're a reasonable man.

But sometimes, when God is encouraging you and I to walk in faith, He's not encouraging us to be reasonable. He's encouraging us to have faith and to trust.

We naturally follow the path of least resistance. We tend to avoid anything that might intimidate us or take us out of our comfort zone. And I acknowledge that I have glommed on to that mentality and attitude just as much as anybody else.

But here on the threshold of the Promised Land—just like you and I many times in our walk with Jesus—they were faced with a critical choice: Will I trust God, even when this doesn't appear to be the prudent or reasonable decision, but when, in fact, I know that I know this is what God has told me to do?

And the nation of Israel opted for what they considered to be the path of least resistance, rather than to dare to trust God with all of their hearts and lean not on their own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5)

And this decision, these choices, are the same for you and I on a—on, on—I don't know about a daily basis, but on a regular basis. Again, particularly as it relates to the kingdom of God, right?

When you read the Book of Acts, do you see people taking the easy path, or do you see people challenged to step outside their comfort zone? And what was prudent?

I mean, when the Apostle Paul was dragged outside the city limits and stoned and left for dead, was it prudent of him—after he miraculously got up, after the believers surrounded him in prayer—and then to go back in the city? (Acts 14:19–20) People would have gone, Paul, no. That's dumb.

And you guys remember, toward the end of the Book of Acts, it says that while Paul was making his way on the final trip to Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit was speaking prophetically to those who had a prophetic gifting. And they were foretelling through the Spirit that Paul would suffer greatly when he went to Jerusalem, that he would, in fact, be arrested and that he would suffer.

And the people interpreted that as, Paul, don't go! Don't go! And Paul said, yeah, you guys, you're breaking my heart. I'm not only ready to go, I'm ready to die for Jesus. It's all for Him. I'm willing to take that risk. (Acts 21:10–13)

These chapters, these last two chapters, provide for you and I this huge, insightful example of what it means to be willing to walk with Jesus and to risk things for the sake of walking out the promises of God. But to step out in faith, there are going to be people who will be right there to warn you and tell you, this is dumb. This is—don't go, don't do it.

There will always be these spies, these men who just—and we got to be careful, you guys. We got to be careful as believers, can I just tell you something? If God is speaking to you about something related to the kingdom of God, be very careful how you talk about it to someone who's entrenched in the kingdom of man. They won't understand! And they will look at you just like these men looked at the nation of Israel and said, this is stupid to go in there, right? Because they don't have a sense of faith in God and trusting in Him.

And then the other thing that we all—I think we learn from this passage too—is the great danger of putting our focus on the things that frighten us, when God has called us to step out in faith.

These men came along and said, there's giants in the land! And you can just hear that reverberating, I'm sure, through the camp. Giants! Giants! Giants! Giants! Giants! As it makes its way through the people.

And what are they thinking from that point on? There's giants in the land. Rather than saying, our God is bigger than any giant or any army of giants. Our God can defeat anything, anyone. Nothing is impossible for the Lord my God.

See, that's the focus that they were supposed to have. God called us here. God gave us the land. God is going to oversee the victory of the people of God in the land, right? That's the focus that we're supposed to have. That's why we spend time in the Word of God, right? That's why we open up our Bibles.

I got to immerse myself in this reminder: God is able to do exceedingly, abundantly beyond what I could ask or think—and all these other wonderful promises that come from God's Word.

Otherwise, if I put it down, close it up, and I just listen to the voice of the enemy or the voice of the world, it's going to be, Giants. Giants. Giants. Ooh. Pretty soon, you're going to be quaking in your boots and unable to respond to the direction of the Lord when He calls you to step out in faith.