

NUMBERS

Lesson 14 - Chapter 12

In Numbers chapter 11, we heard of the general rebellions of the people of Israel and of the resident aliens (those who were traveling with Israel but did NOT wish to be Israelites), who lived on the outskirts of the camp and were accused of instigating at least some of the rebellions.

Now, in Numbers 12, we are saddened to find that those closest to Moses also grumble and rebel: Aaron, the High Priest (Moses' brother), and Miriam (Moses' sister) who is the leader of the women of Israel.

Watch closely as we read Numbers 12, for we will see some important patterns develop around Moses, that will in time be transposed to Jesus Christ. Moses is a mediator for God Our Father and for mankind, as will be Yeshua.

Allow me to comment about the word "Mediator", because it has a very specific meaning. Sometimes you'll hear or see the word "Intermediary" used as a synonym for Mediator. Not only is that quite incorrect from a technical standpoint, but it also has the greatest of theological and spiritual ramifications such that we must decide whether Yeshua is an intermediary OR a Mediator. This is one of those words that one must pay attention to when the doctrines of a denomination or religion are being discussed; for there is a vast and critical gulf that separates a Mediator and an Intermediary.

Let me point out that this issue is an ancient one, and was hotly discussed and debated long before Yeshua entered the world. And, this issue centered around the nature of the Word of God.....also called Logos in Greek and known as Memra in Hebrew.....and what the essence of the Word amounted to; was He a mediator or was He an intermediary? Or, in fact, was the term "the Word" nothing but another way of speaking of the godly attribute of Wisdom (that's a matter, however, for another discussion)?

The difference is essentially this: an ***intermediary*** is a being who is halfway between God and Man. In other words the intermediary is NOT God, but he is also not a man. He is something else altogether. Angels might be seen as examples of intermediaries: they are not men, but they are also not God...they are something else entirely. Angels in my opinion are indeed "intermediaries". And in fact, we'll see several mentions of some ill-defined spiritual essence or being in the Bible called "the angel of the Lord". And, the arguments are varied among scholars whether what this is referring to is simply a regular angel with a special assignment, or perhaps this angel of the Lord is but another of the several manifestations of God Himself;

or even simply another name for the Word, the Logos, the Memra.

However a MEDIATOR is not an intermediate being; a Mediator is not some other kind of creature with a status or station that is between two others. Therefore Angels are NOT Mediators. Biblically a Mediator could be a man OR He could be God.....but he cannot be some kind of in-between creature (neither man nor God). He is an agent or someone who carries out instructions, yet as a being, he is on par with either God or man. A mediator is an assignment or even a characteristic or attribute of someone or something. The High Priest of Israel, Aaron in the Book of Numbers, was a mediator. So was Moses. And since the NT makes it clear that Jesus is our High Priest and the mediator of the newer covenant just as Moses was mediator of the earlier covenant (at Mt. Sinai), we can use the pattern and example of Moses to better help us to understand the role of Yeshua our Messiah.

So you can see why it is important to distinguish (especially as it comes to Yeshua) whether He is an intermediary or whether he is a mediator. Was Yeshua God, or was He man, or was He some type of intermediate being? Moses was a mediator. He wasn't a specially designed creature, halfway between a god and a man. Therefore neither is Jesus an intermediate being, halfway between a god and a man.

OK. Let's read Numbers 12, and learn a little more about God's special agent, the Mediator Moses.

READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 12 all

The High Priest Aaron and his sister, the prophetess Miriam, challenge Moses' position and authority. And, verse 1 tells us that the catalyst for their rebellion was Moses' wife. Moses' wife is referred to here by many bibles (including the CJB) as "that Ethiopian woman". Some versions will say "that Cushite woman". Which is correct and what is the difference? The disagreement comes from whether one believes that Ethiopia in North Africa was indeed the territory founded by Cush, or was Cush's territory actually the area that included Midian? In fact the original Hebrew is ***Kuwshith***, which literally means Cushite.

So what did Aaron and Miriam have against Moses' wife, the Cushite woman? We're not told. If we take this verse at face value, it may have been a racial issue. There's been a lot of speculation by Rabbis and Sages and scholars over just what is meant by "Cushite" as used in this verse. For sure, it is referring to the family tree of Cush, who was a member of the lineage of the cursed Ham. And, we know that Cushites were black-skinned people, usually identified with early Ethiopia (but not agreed to by all scholars). However this all presents a problem. Because in Exodus we're told that Moses was married to Tziphora, a Midianite woman. Midianites and Cushites were two separate tribes, and Midianites were not a race of black people.

There are a couple of general lines of thoughts on the matter: first, is that perhaps the Cushites occupied Midian at this point in history, and not Ethiopia yet. Next, is that the woman spoken of here is ANOTHER wife of Moses, not Tziphora Moses' first wife. I'm afraid that both of these

are speculation and plausible to one degree or another. However, this single illusion to this Cushite wife is all there is in all Scripture to even hint that possibly Moses had more than one wife so I'm not too convinced that was the case.

What is becoming clearer over time is that at some very early point in history the term Cushite became more of a racial identification than tribal. In other words while we recognize that black humans in general come from Africa, the scientific anthropologic term for them, Negro, does not identify a specific tribe but a race with skin color as the primary characteristic. That said technically DNA study shows that all black skinned folks did have an ancient common ancestral line, and while the FIRST black person has not been pin-pointed in the scientific community the Bible indicates that it was probably Cush (perhaps it was Ham, his father). Thus it is not unreasonable to speculate that Moses' wife Tziphora was indeed a very dark skinned person who on one hand would have been racially described as a Cushite but tribally as a Midianite. Midianites were typically dark skinned, but other physical features were different enough from the African people so as not to be identified as a tribe of racially black people. But as we ought to have learned by now, racial and tribal intermarriage was completely usual and normal so it would not have surprised anyone of that era that a very dark skinned woman belonged to the Midianite tribe.

Discounting the possibility that Moses had a 2nd wife, a Cushite woman, some have wondered WHY, just now, would Aaron and Miriam express such shock over Moses' choice of Tziphora as a wife (if that's who is being referred to here), since he married her quite some time earlier.....before the Exodus from Egypt. But, that is easily solved in that we're explicitly told that Tziphora did NOT accompany Moses to Egypt, but rather went to rejoin him on Israel's march out in the Wilderness. So, it could well be that Aaron and Miriam had just now met the woman, and found her obviously to be NOT Hebrew....not even Semitic.... and so unacceptable to them. I kind of lean that direction. After all, the rebellion of the non-Hebrews, the resident aliens, (Numbers 11) had just occurred and caused much death and destruction within Israel's camp. So, for Moses to show up with a non-Hebrew wife.....even non-Semitic... would have been a sensitive issue right about now.

Ah. But the REAL reason for Miriam and Aaron's lashing out was not Moses' wife at all; it was that they were jealous of Moses' close relationship with God. As they said in verse 2, "has God not spoken through us as well?"

The great Rabbis say that Moses did not overhear this grumbling of his siblings because it was not addressed to him; but God did hear. Therefore, that is why we don't see any reference to Moses going to God with the problem and complaint of Aaron and Miriam, as he had with the earlier complaints from the general population of Israel. And, the text immediately follows up, in verse 3, by letting all of us know that the charges implicit in their grumbling were false; that Moses was doing nothing wrong, and did not hold himself up as special or aloof, and in fact was "the humblest man in all the earth".

Now, I just said that the text said Moses was humble. Your Bibles may say "meek". The Hebrew word is **'anav** and it is often translated as "meek", especially in the KJV and some other older versions based on Latin texts. Meek is not necessarily wrong. However, it is a word

that is obsolete within our modern day English, and so we have trouble discerning just what "meek" means. Humble, I think, is the best word in our modern vocabulary to express what it is getting at. And, it is the kind of humble that one would find in a very poor person, who knows they have no power and very limited ability to control their lives. And, yes, even in the Greek-based NT, where we see Christ say that the "meek shall inherit the earth", you can substitute humble and be closer to the mark: "the humble shall inherit the earth". The idea being that it's not the leaders of the world with their great plans, huge egos and even larger armies that will eventually rule the planet and the people (although they certainly think they will). Rather, it is the regular folk, who don't have any power or delusions of grandeur, who will rule with Messiah. And, sometime down the line, I'll also show you that in Christ's day, the term "meek" or "humble" tended to point to an even more specific group of people, as identified in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Lord now calls Aaron and Miriam on the carpet; He summons them, and Moses, to the Tent because this matter must be dealt with in a legal way. But a question that raises some real interesting issues arises here: which tent is being spoken of? They are both at times called the ohel moed, which means tent of meeting. The tent (or two tents) was where God would meet with man. There was a tent on the outskirts of the camp that is spoken of in earlier chapters.

CJB Numbers 11:23 ADONAI answered Moshe, "Has ADONAI's arm grown short? Now you will see whether what I said will happen or not!" 24 Moshe went out and told the people what ADONAI had said. Then he collected seventy of the leaders of the people and placed them all around the tent. 25 ADONAI came down in the cloud, spoke to him, took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy leaders. When the Spirit came to rest on them, they prophesied- then but not afterwards. 26 There were two men who stayed in the camp, one named Eldad and the other Medad, and the Spirit came to rest on them. They were among those listed to go out to the tent, but they hadn't done so, and they prophesied in the camp.

And there was also a tent located at the center of the encampment where the Priesthood operates.

CJB Numbers 2:1 ADONAI said to Moshe and Aharon, 2 "The people of Isra'el are to set up camp by clans, each man with his own banner and under his clan's symbol; they are to camp around the tent of meeting, but at a distance. 3 "Those camping on the east side toward the sunrise are to be under the banner of the camp of Y'udah; they are to camp according to companies; by tribe and leader they are as follows: Tribe Chief Number Y'udah Nachshon the son of 'Amminadav 74,600 Yissakhar N'tan'el the son of Tzu'ar 54,400 Z'vulun Eli'av the son of Helon 57,400 Total 186,400 "This group is to set out first.

Most gentile Christian scholars say it was the same tent, only at some point the one on the outskirts got moved to the center of the encampment. Ancient Rabbinical sources say that it was indeed two separate tents for two separate purposes.

We are clearly told that the Wilderness Tabernacle is the tent at the center with the Levites immediately surrounding it and then the other tribes forming an outer circle. When we look very closely at Holy Scripture we find some distinct differences in how the meeting between God and man took place, depending on which tent it occurred. It is only at the Priestly Tent, the Wilderness Tabernacle proper, where only Moses could hear God's voice (while Moses was inside the Holy Place), but on occasion Aaron could hear God's voice but ONLY when Aaron was in the courtyard and NOT inside the tent.

But ANYONE (not just Moses and Aaron) could seek an oracle from God at the tent located on the outskirts of the camp.

CJB Exodus 33:7 Moshe would take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far away from the camp. He called it the tent of meeting. Everyone who wanted to consult ADONAI would go out to the tent of meeting, outside the camp.

Now, the real \$64,000 question in all this is: where was the Ark located? Was it in outer tent, or the one at the center of the camp? The typical argument is that it had to be located at the Wilderness Tabernacle in the center of the camp. Yet we find that Joshua was stationed permanently inside the outer tent (probably as a guard) and we find the same thing with Samuel hundreds of years later. The Presence of God was ALWAYS within a tent, and as far as we know it was ALWAYS above the Ark; but there is much doubt as to whether or not there was ONLY one authorized tent for the Ark.

For sure the Ark always required a shelter to be far from the gaze of ANY human, including Moses and the High Priest (except for once per year on Yom Kippur). Moses, by the way, did NOT enter the Holiest Place to communicate with God; He remained on the outside of Parokhet, the inner veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies.

I suspect that the Ark was moved back and forth at God or Moses' command, although no such thing is specifically mentioned. One thing seems clear, though: it is not necessarily (as is usually taught) that the ONLY divinely authorized place for the Ark of the Covenant was in the Tabernacle. Apparently the Lord on somewhat of a case-by-case basis could determine WHERE it resided.

Thus a long time into the future we find King David calling for the Ark to be brought to him in Jerusalem. It first goes to the personal home of a Levite named Obed-Edom, and then in time it was housed in a tent that David erected in Jerusalem especially for it. This tent for sure was not the Wilderness Tabernacle and we are specifically told that as a result of the Ark being in Obed-Edom's home, his whole household was blessed; and there is NO consequence or negative statement about David later housing it in a tent that he built for it. So there is a lot of mystery about this, and we must also be careful not to be too rigid on the subject.

Anyway, God is thoroughly upset with Moses' sister and brother for openly questioning Moses' station with the Lord and now God is going to handle it His way. Moses is the accused and Aaron and Miriam the accusers, so all must be present before the Great Judge of the Universe, Yehoveh. And, in the next 4 verses God directly speaks to Miriam and Aaron. In fact, He tells

them to "come forward and hear My words". That is, the accusers, the rebels, are separated from Moses; some Hebrew commentaries even suggest that Moses did not hear what Yehoveh said to Aaron and Miriam because it was a private conversation.

What is said is kind of a combination of high praise and vindication for Moses, along with brutally frank chastisement towards Miriam and Aaron. And, God says that Moses is in a class all by himself. That among all men on the face the earth Moses is unique. In other words.....**Aaron and Miriam, you simply don't rank with Moses.** Actually, no other individual alive breathes the rarified air that Moses breathes.

That is the meaning of the discourse in verses 6 and 7 where God explains that when He decides to make a man (or woman) a prophet of His, He does this by making Himself known to that person by means of a vision. God speaks to the person in a dream. But, when it comes to Moses, Yehoveh deals with him in an entirely different manner; God deals with Him face to face, in audible conversation and not in riddles. Further, God shows more of Himself to Moses than He does to any other man.

Actually, where our CJB and most other Bibles say that God speaks to Moses "face to face", it really says that God speaks to Moses **pe 'el pe** which literally means, "mouth to mouth". In Hebrew, the use of the term "face" means "presence". So, even though it is true that God and Moses speak "presence to presence", this verse is getting at something more: that the communication amounts to DIRECT revelation, while Moses is fully conscious, and represents the concept that a 2 way conversion is occurring.

Let's dissect this a bit more. Moses has been given an unprecedented position among men; He serves Almighty God in a direct manner, and therefore Almighty God deals with Moses in a direct manner. God establishes prophets (Miriam) AND High Priests (Aaron) in an *indirect* manner. He made laws and ordinances that were to be carried out by men to establish the line of High Priests, and to put each succeeding High Priest into power. And the Lord consecrates prophets in a kind of clairvoyant way, by somehow putting visions of Himself, along with the declaration that He has declared that person to be His prophet, within the unconscious mind of the chosen person. Then he gives that prophet the messages He wants passed along to mankind, but He does this by means of dealing with these prophets' mysteriously in visions and dreams.

But, with Moses, it's different. With Moses, the contact with God is as close as it gets between the fleshly and the spiritual. God has conversation with Moses just as you and I would think of conversation. A dialogue. I say something, you respond. You offer a suggestion, I reply. I ask a question, you give me the answer. I say I don't understand, so you elaborate. A give and take, an exchange of information occurs. This is what went on between Moses and God. Of course God was supreme and Moses submissive, but the whole concept is that God could be swayed by Moses and that as according His will, God would at times give in to Moses.

Even more, Yehoveh makes it clear that He has put Moses in charge of "all His household". Let us be clear what God means by this. The Lord's household, at least on earth, is Israel. The Lord established His household with the creation of Israel as a people set apart for Himself.

Yehoveh put Moses in charge of that household by means of declaration. In other words, Moses was just an ordinary flesh and blood man. He was no better or worse than any other man. But, God divided, elected, and separated Moses away from all other men for His own good reasons, and then declared Moses to be the master of His household, just as Pharaoh declared Joseph to be master of all HIS household.....Egypt. Moses bears God's authority and power just as Joseph bore the power and authority of Pharaoh back in Egypt. Yet, Moses wasn't God Almighty, and neither was Joseph the Pharaoh of Egypt.

Now that Aaron and Miriam understand the position of Moses; and that unlike a High Priest there is no pre-established line of succession, there is no vote or approval of the people to decide who is to be in charge of God's household.....Israel. There is no democracy set up here. God voices His anger against those who would DARE to speak against such a God-appointed mediator as Moses. And, that there is a price to pay for rebelling against him.

The price, the wages of this rebellion, was that Miriam was stricken with what most Bibles will say is Leprosy. Wrong. She was stricken with Tzara'at. Indeed Tzara'at was a skin disease, but it was not Leprosy. Leprosy wasn't even known in that part of the world until hundreds of years into the future.

Besides, the Hebrew word used here, Tzara'at, doesn't indicate a specific disease. There were several different levels and kinds of Tzara'at that ranged from minor to very serious. But key to understanding the term Tzara'at is that it is a spiritually based infliction. It is the outward manifestation of one's inward and hidden condition. It is a God thing, whereby Tzara'at is a punishment or a disciplinary action upon an individual, divinely caused.

Now, there is no mention of a punishment upon Aaron. I have no idea why. But, this is not the first time we've seen Aaron easily led into sin; he did so when the people cried to him to build a Golden Calf, and (although reluctantly), he did as they asked. This is a good reminder to us all that even though Aaron was High Priest, he was still just a man. He wasn't any less or more sinful in nature than those beneath him. He didn't have his evil inclination removed. Temptations were still placed in his way just as for us modern Believers. And, he failed from time to time (again just like us modern Believers), no matter his intent not to.

In brief, look at the pattern set up here in Moses; the pattern of how the Messiah would be established.

1. He would be declared, or spoken, into existence.
2. Even though He was, on the one hand, human, his position as Messiah had no human peer.
3. The Messiah was to be God's trusted master over His entire household. And, who is God's household? Israel.....and all who would be joined to Israel by means of those covenants given to Israel. Jesus was given all of the Father's authority over men.
4. Men would come against the Messiah, and say that this man doesn't have anything they don't. That they are just as close to God, that they hear from God, that they have just as much standing with God as does Yeshua.
5. That as great as God's appointed prophets are and were; that as superior and

- important as the High Priest was, this Mediator was above them all.
6. That the great Mediator would have God's own spirit in him, and if others were to have God's Spirit it would have to be drawn from Moses', and later Yeshua's, body.
 7. The Messiah would be humble, meek. He would NOT come as great world leader, seeking to rule all in his own power. Rather, he would be a reluctant leader, but always willing to bow the will of the Father.
 8. The Messiah would NOT be an intermediary being; He would be a Mediator and Intercessor. He was not some other kind of being, he was fully a man. And, yet, he was fully God. Not a hybrid of the two, and not something halfway in between a man and a god, like an angel. Let me emphatically state that while the Mediator/Intercessor attribute of Moses was fully carried out in Yeshua, that certainly the aspect of Christ's being fully God and fully man was totally unique to Jesus. This was something that Moses was NOT, because there could only have ever been ONE with that mysterious, inscrutable characteristic... and that ONE is Messiah Yeshua.

Then, in verse 11 we're introduced to yet another piece of the pattern that would be established in Moses and followed in Messiah: Aaron, even though God's presence is right there with him, pleads forgiveness of his sin.....from MOSES! Aaron says to his brother, Moses: "OH my Lord, account not to us the sin which we committed in our folly". WOW! What was Aaron thinking? He calls Moses, "my Lord", and asks MOSES not to count their rebellion as sin? Trust me: this is NOT like you or I asking someone we have offended to forgive us. This is not Aaron asking Moses, as a brother, to accept his apology. We **offend** people, but we **sin** against God.

Is this not exactly how we are to approach Yeshua? Are we not to ask Yeshua "my Lord, please do not count against us the offenses that we have committed against the Father"?

Aaron finally got it. He now understood the lofty position of Moses. He understood that Moses was God's appointed Mediator and Intercessor. And, while it was not Moses, per se, who does the forgiving (it was Abba, the Father), there WAS no approaching God except through Moses. And, whatever Moses decided on a matter, and spoke it to the people as his decision, it was done with the power and authority of the Almighty Father.

We pray by MEANS of our Mediator, Yeshua, TO the Father. We do NOT pray to the Mediator as the SOURCE of the power and authority. Jesus says all power and authority was given to him; so, WHO gave Jesus that power and authority? Yehoveh, the Father. When asked by Jesus just how we should pray.....and this occurred AFTER He made it clear that He was God.....He said we should pray "Our Father". And, Jesus Himself prayed "Our Father". Yeshua was God. He wielded the power and authority of the Father, Yehoveh.....yet, He is NOT the Father. Rather, He is Yeshua, the Word, who is God the Son. Don't ask me to make this any easier to understand, because I can't. This leaves us all with a giant mystery; I understand that. But, I think we should accept this as the amazing mystery that it is because if it was fully comprehensible by our minds.....fully rational and logical and scientific.....where is the need for faith? Mankind has tried to draw up all kinds of models and use all kinds of human words and phrases to describe the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (and perhaps some other manifestations of God like the Angle of the Lord) and these attempts fall so short that

they seem to inevitably send us off on wild-goose chases and result in strange doctrines. Let's just observe the Messiah-patterns of Joseph and Moses.....accept what Jesus said about His relationship to the Holy Spirit and to the Father.....and get all we can from that, and leave the rest alone.

So in verse 13, Moses.....as Mediator.....takes Aaron's request to heal his sister Miriam from the divinely wrought Tzara'at that was now upon her, to the Lord.

I can tell you with full confidence that Miriam was healed right on the spot even though it is not specifically detailed. Right then. How do I know this was the case? Because of the Levitical laws concerning impurity and the rituals of purification. Yehoveh answers Moses by saying, "let her be shut out of the camp for 7 days". Don't let the part about "if her father spat in her face" send you up a rabbit trail. It simply means that if a woman's father found fault in her, and humiliated her for her indiscretion, that he would send her away from him for a time.

Notice the comparison made between a stillborn baby (in verse 12).....one who died in the womb for whatever reason..... and the Tzara'at that afflicted Miriam. This Tzara'at was a kind of death, just as the death of the unborn child. However, Miriam's condition is NOT compared to the death of a baby because Miriam was in danger of physically dying from her Tzara'at; in general, Tzara'at (despite the many Hollywood movies to the contrary) was not a deadly disease, although it was often disfiguring. The comparison is because Biblically, true death.....eternal death.....is separation from God. And, the Levitical Laws separated a person who was ritually unclean separated from God. They were, in essence, in a state of spiritual death. Their souls, or spirits, were as dead and rotting away, as was the body of a stillborn infant. And, the skin condition called Tzara'at was merely an outward manifestation of that inner dead and rotting away.

So, Miriam faced the standard procedure for ANYONE who contracted Tzara'at..... they had to be put outside the camp because they were ritually impure; they were separated from God's people, because they were separated from God. Miriam was put outside the camp for 7 days. And here is how I know that she was immediately healed by God: the normal ritual period of cleansing for a person who has Tzara'at (7 days) does not start until that person is FREE of any signs of Tzara'at. In other words, until that person no longer HAS Tzara'at the clock that counts down that 7-day period doesn't begin ticking. This is a principle..... a law..... that applies to virtually all of the purification rituals. The CAUSE of the ritual impurity has to be gone, before the prescribed period of cleansing can begin.

Further, this whole scene is eerily similar to a time when Moses first met God and he wanted proofs about who God was, and what the extent of God's power amounted to. Recall that Yehoveh told Moses to put his arm inside his cloak, and when he pulled it out, his arm was white with Tzara'at. But, when God instructed him to put his diseased arm back into his cloak, the healing was instantaneous and complete. In essence, the same thing is afforded for Moses' sister, the prophetess Miriam; she was struck with Tzara'at to reveal her inner sinful condition that led to her preposterous accusation towards Moses, but then the Lord instantly healed her once the point was made.

And, because of Miriam's great standing within the community of Israel, all Israel remained at Hazeroth.....where they were camped.....until Miriam's 7 day period of purification ended. This was no small thing; ALL Israel paid the price of Miriam's sin and rebellion, by having their journey to the Promised Land delayed by a week. Those of us who are leaders, teachers, pastors, or prophets need to understand that when we exhibit sin we can harm those we lead and teach and are appointed to care for. When we get full of ourselves and teach speculation as fact, or men's doctrines as God's truth, or make predictions that are of our own minds and not of God's, then we not only commit sin we impede those to whom we're responsible to be minister. And we will be held accountable.

The chapter ends by telling us that after that week passed Israel moved on from Hazeroth to Paran.....a desert wilderness. Likely where they next camped for an extended stay was Kadesh.

We'll start chapter 13 next time.