

## The Book of Numbers, Teacher's Guide

### Lesson 7: Miriam and Aaron Oppose Moses

#### Numbers 12:1-16

##### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson confronts the sin of presumption: speaking against the leader God Himself had appointed. What is doctrinally at stake is the holiness and order of God. Numbers 12 shows that God hears not only public rebellion but private grumbling, that He takes seriously any assault on the authority He has established, and that He is jealous for His servants. The chapter holds together two truths that our culture likes to separate: God disciplines (Miriam's leprosy is real and severe) and God is merciful (He heals when Moses intercedes). The consequences still stand for seven days even after the sin is pardoned, a sober reminder that forgiveness does not always erase every result of our actions.

The aim for the student is the formation of genuine meekness. Moses models a heart so secure in God that he does not need to win, defend, or retaliate. This is not the weakness of a man who cannot fight back; it is the strength of a man who has surrendered his cause to God. Lead the class to see that jealousy and pride lurk behind much of our complaining, that the tongue can do enormous damage, and that the gospel calls us to honor those who labor among us. Without reading the New Testament eldership back into Israel, we can apply the abiding principle: God establishes order, and a humble heart submits to it (Hebrews 13:17).

Above all, let the class see Christ. Moses, the meekest man on earth, who would not defend himself and who prayed for the sister who attacked him, points forward to the Lord Jesus, who was led as a lamb to the slaughter and opened not His mouth, and who from the cross prayed, Father, forgive them. The goal is not merely to scold critics into silence but to lift up the beauty of a meek and forgiving heart and to invite each student to be formed into that likeness.

##### Question 1

##### Student Question:

*Numbers 12:1-2 begins with Miriam and Aaron speaking against Moses about his wife, but quickly shifts to the real complaint. What does their question Has the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? reveal about the true nature of their grievance, and why does the text say the Lord heard it?*

##### Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter opens with a deceptively small detail: Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married. Miriam is named first, and the Hebrew verb for spoke is feminine singular, suggesting she was the instigator. The marriage may have offended

family pride, but the text moves swiftly past it, because the wife is not the real issue. She is the pretext.

The true complaint surfaces in verse 2: Has the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Has he not spoken also by us? Here is the heart laid bare. This is jealousy over position, resentment that Moses occupied a place they did not. Miriam was a prophetess (Exodus 15:20) and Aaron the high priest. They had real standing. But standing was not enough; they wanted parity with Moses, and they resented his unique nearness to God.

The closing line of verse 2 is quietly ominous: And the Lord heard it. They thought they were speaking privately, among family, behind closed doors. They were not. God hears the grumbling we imagine is hidden. Nothing said against His servant escaped Him. This sets the stage for everything that follows.

Notice how respectable the complaint sounds. It is framed almost as a theological observation, a reasonable question about the breadth of God's revelation. But God reads the heart beneath the words. Jealousy is endlessly inventive at finding noble-sounding language for ignoble desires.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God hears private grumbling and takes it seriously; nothing said against His order is hidden from Him.
- Jealousy often disguises itself behind a reasonable-sounding complaint about something else.
- Spiritual standing of our own (Miriam the prophetess, Aaron the priest) does not entitle us to resent the place God gives others.
- The desire for recognition and parity can quietly corrode even a faithful heart.
- Sins of speech against God-appointed leaders are not minor matters in God's sight.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why do you think the text lets the wife drop so quickly and dwells on the second complaint instead?
- What does it mean for our daily speech that the Lord heard it even though no one else was meant to?
- How can we tell the difference between a legitimate concern and jealousy wearing a respectable mask?

### **Question 2**

**Student Question:**

*Miriam and Aaron raised a side issue (the Cushite wife) to mask a deeper jealousy over Moses' place. Where in your own life have you used a small, defensible complaint to cover a desire for more recognition or control?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verse 3 contains one of the most remarkable parenthetical statements in the Bible: Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth. It is placed precisely here, in the middle of an attack, to explain why Moses does nothing to defend himself.

Biblical meekness is not weakness or timidity. The same Moses had stood before Pharaoh, had broken the tablets in righteous anger at the golden calf, and would later face down rebellion. Meekness is strength under God's control, power yielded to God, a refusal to grasp for vindication because one trusts God to handle it.

This is the crucial distinction for the class. Our culture confuses meekness with being a doormat. Scripture presents it as the disciplined strength of someone who could retaliate but chooses to entrust himself to God. Moses had the standing and the words to fight back. He simply did not.

The contrast is stark. Miriam and Aaron grasp for position; Moses holds his loosely. They speak; he is silent. They defend their importance; he leaves his vindication entirely to God. The meek man is the one most secure, because his identity rests in God and not in winning.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Meekness is strength under God's control, not weakness, cowardice, or passivity.
- The same Moses could confront Pharaoh boldly and remain silent under personal attack; meekness chooses its battles by God's will, not pride.
- True security of identity in God frees a person from the need to defend or vindicate himself.
- The world's misreading of meekness as weakness must be corrected by Scripture.
- Self-defense is not always faith; sometimes silence and trust are the more faithful response.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How would you explain the difference between meekness and weakness to someone who thought they were the same?
- What makes it possible for a strong, capable person to stay silent under unjust criticism?
- Where is your identity most rooted, and how does that shape how hard you fight to defend yourself?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*Numbers 12:3 calls Moses very meek, above all the men on the earth. What does biblical meekness mean here, and how is it different from weakness or cowardice, given that Moses had earlier confronted Pharaoh and would later confront Israel?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

In verses 4–8 God Himself intervenes. He suddenly summons all three to the tent of meeting and comes down in the pillar of cloud. Moses did not call this meeting; God did. The servant who would not speak for himself now has the Lord speaking on his behalf.

God draws a sharp distinction. To ordinary prophets He makes Himself known in visions and dreams, indirect and veiled. But with Moses it is different: With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches. Moses beheld the form of the Lord. This was a unique nearness, a unique authority.

The point is not that Moses was inherently superior as a person, but that God had appointed and authorized him in a singular way. To speak against Moses was therefore to speak against the one God had set apart. This is why the rebuke is so weighty.

Then the searching question: Wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? The word servant is key. Moses belonged to God. An attack on God's servant was an affront to God Himself. A healthy fear of the Lord would have closed their mouths.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God defends the servant who refuses to defend himself.
- God uniquely authorized Moses; rejecting His appointed leader was rejecting God's own arrangement.
- To speak against the Lord's servant is to provoke the Lord, who calls him my servant.
- A proper fear of God restrains careless and presumptuous speech.
- Authority in God's people is established by God, not seized by the ambitious.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does God emphasize the unique way He spoke with Moses rather than simply rebuking the complaint directly?
- What would change in our speech if we truly believed that opposing God's appointed servant provokes God Himself?
- How does a healthy fear of God protect us from presumption?

### **Question 4**

**Student Question:**

*Moses made no attempt to defend himself when his own brother and sister attacked him. When you are criticized unfairly, what is your first instinct, and what would it look like for you to entrust your defense to God instead?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

When the cloud departs in verses 9–10, Miriam is left leprous, white as snow. The anger of the Lord had been kindled, and the judgment is immediate and visible. Leprosy made her ceremonially unclean and would, by the law, exclude her from the camp.

It is worth noting that Miriam alone is struck, though Aaron also sinned. Several reasons are suggested: she appears to have been the instigator (named first, feminine verb), and Aaron as high priest could not function while unclean, so the nation's worship would have been disrupted. Aaron is not let off; he is brought to immediate, anguished repentance.

Aaron's words in verse 11 are a model confession: Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. He calls it sin and folly, without excuse or minimizing. The proud accuser is now the broken penitent.

Here the class meets God's holiness in earnest. God is not indifferent to rebellion against His order. The discipline is real, severe, and public. And yet, as the next verses show, it is not the end of the story. Holiness and mercy meet here, but holiness is not waved away.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God's holiness means rebellion against His order brings real and serious consequences.
- Discipline can be severe and public, exposing sin that was meant to stay hidden.
- Genuine repentance names sin plainly as sin and folly, without excuse (Aaron in 12:11).
- Leadership sin disrupts the whole community, not just the individual.
- God's judgment here is just; it is the rebels, not Moses, who are exposed.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why might God have struck Miriam openly while bringing Aaron to repentance another way?
- What does Aaron's confession teach us about how to own our sin honestly?
- How do we hold together the love of God and the seriousness with which He treats rebellion?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*In Numbers 12:6–8 God distinguishes how He spoke to other prophets (visions and dreams) from how He spoke with Moses (mouth to mouth, plainly). Why does God make this distinction, and*

*what does it say about the danger of speaking against the one God had appointed and uniquely authorized?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The climax of the chapter is Moses' prayer in verse 13: And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee. This is the man who had just been attacked, praying for the healing of his attacker. The cry is short, urgent, and selfless.

Consider what Moses does not do. He does not gloat. He does not say she got what she deserved. He does not demand an apology first. The moment Aaron pleads, Moses intercedes. The meek man becomes the mediator for the very people who wronged him.

This is where the chapter shines brightest as a foreshadowing of Christ. Moses, the meekest man on earth, who would not defend himself and who prayed for the sister who attacked him, anticipates the Lord Jesus who opened not His mouth before His accusers and who prayed, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

God answers, but with a condition that preserves both mercy and justice. He heals Miriam, yet she must be shut outside the camp seven days, as if her father had spit in her face. The sin is pardoned; a consequence remains. Mercy is real, but it does not pretend the rebellion never happened.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Intercession for those who wrong us is the mark of a meek and Christlike heart.
- Moses, the meek mediator who prays for his attackers, foreshadows Christ who prayed for His.
- God hears intercessory prayer and shows mercy.
- Pardon and consequence can coexist: the sin is forgiven, yet the seven days outside the camp stand.
- Forgiveness does not require that we wait for the offender to grovel; Moses prayed at once.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What is the difference between Moses praying for Miriam and merely tolerating what she did?
- How does Moses here point us toward the Lord Jesus on the cross?
- Why do you think God healed Miriam yet still required the seven days outside the camp?

### **Question 6**

**Student Question:**

*God asks Miriam and Aaron, Were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? (12:8). When have you spoken too quickly or too boldly about someone in authority, and what would a healthy fear of God have changed about your words?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Step back and look at the anatomy of the whole episode. It begins with talk, the kind of grumbling that feels harmless because it stays among family. Miriam and Aaron probably did not think of themselves as rebels. They were just airing a grievance. But God names it for what it was: speaking against His servant, and ultimately against Him.

This is how sins of the tongue so often work. They start small and private and self-justifying. We tell ourselves we are only being honest, only expressing a concern, only sharing with someone we trust. James warns that the tongue is a small member that boasts great things, a fire that sets a whole forest ablaze (James 3:5–6).

The lesson for the believer is to take our words seriously, especially our words about people God has placed over us. The complaint that feels so reasonable in the moment may be jealousy in disguise. The Lord hears what we say in the car, in the hallway, in the text message we think is private.

And the application is not merely negative. The antidote to grumbling is the meekness of Moses: a heart so anchored in God that it does not need to tear others down to feel secure. Where we find ourselves quick to criticize, the deeper need is usually a heart that has stopped trusting God with our own place and worth.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Sins of the tongue begin small, private, and self-justifying, then do great damage (James 3:5–6).
- We are accountable for what we say about others, even in supposedly private settings.
- The reasonable-sounding complaint can be jealousy in disguise.
- The cure for a critical spirit is a heart secure in God, not merely tighter lips.
- God hears our private words and weighs them.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where do your most careless words about others tend to come out, and who hears them?
- How does insecurity feed a critical, grumbling spirit?
- What practical step could help you bridle your tongue this week?

### **Question 7**

#### **Student Question:**

*Numbers 12:9–10 records the Lord’s anger and Miriam’s leprosy, while Aaron is spared open punishment though he repents. What does this teach about God’s holiness, about the seriousness He attaches to rebellion against His order, and about the reality of consequences even after repentance?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verses 9 and 10 confront us with the reality of divine discipline. The anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and the cloud departed, and behold, Miriam became leprous. We do not like to dwell on God’s anger, but Scripture does not flinch from it. God’s love and God’s holiness are not at war; they are one.

The discipline reveals how seriously God regards the order He establishes among His people. This is not a petty God protecting a favorite. It is a holy God upholding the structure He had ordained for the good of the whole nation. When that structure is attacked, the camp itself is endangered.

Yet even in judgment, mercy is near. The leprosy is not permanent. The moment intercession is offered, God moves toward healing. His discipline aims at restoration, not destruction. He wounds, as it were, in order to heal. Hebrews 12 will later say that the Lord disciplines those He loves.

For the student, the takeaway is sobering and hopeful at once. God will not be mocked, and rebellion has consequences; but His discipline is the discipline of a Father who intends to bring His children back, not to cast them off.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God’s anger and God’s love are not opposites; His holiness and mercy are one.
- Divine discipline upholds the order God establishes for the good of His people.
- God’s discipline aims at restoration, not mere punishment (compare Hebrews 12:5–11).
- Even severe consequences can be the loving correction of a Father.
- Rebellion endangers not just the rebel but the whole community.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why is it important to hold God’s holiness and His mercy together rather than choosing one?
- How does seeing discipline as fatherly correction change the way we receive it?
- In what way did Miriam and Aaron’s sin threaten more than just themselves?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**



*Aaron turns to Moses and pleads, lay not the sin upon us (12:11). Is there someone you have wronged with your words to whom you still need to go and humbly confess, rather than excusing or minimizing what you did?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The New Testament does not leave this story in the past. It reaches back and hands it to us as instruction. First Corinthians 10:10–11 warns against murmuring as Israel murmured, and says these things happened to them for examples and are written for our admonition. Jude 8–11 condemns those who despise dominion and speak evil of dignities, pointing to such rebels as warnings.

This is the bridge from Israel to the church. We do not bind the law of Moses on Christians, and we do not read the New Testament eldership back into the wilderness. But the abiding principle stands: God establishes order among His people, and a humble heart submits to it rather than grumbling against it.

Hebrews 13:17 applies this directly to life in the Lord's church today: Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls. The shepherds God gives the church are to be honored, not undermined by the same kind of grumbling that undid Miriam and Aaron.

So the question for every believer is searching. How do we speak about those who serve and lead among us? Do we strengthen their hands or kindle fires with our tongues? The wilderness story is a mirror, and it asks whether we have learned anything Israel did not.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The New Testament treats Israel's rebellion as written for our instruction (1 Corinthians 10:11).
- Despising God-given authority and speaking evil of leaders is warned against in Jude 8–11.
- The law of Moses is not bound on Christians, yet the principle of God-ordained order abides.
- Hebrews 13:17 calls Christians to honor and submit to those who watch over their souls.
- We must not read the New Testament eldership anachronistically into Israel, yet the same humble spirit is required.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does the New Testament use Israel's wilderness sins, and why should that matter to us?
- What is the difference between honest, respectful concern and the grumbling Jude condemns?
- How can a congregation strengthen, rather than undermine, those who labor and lead among them?

## Question 9

### Student Question:

*When Aaron begs for help, Moses cries out, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee (12:13), interceding for the very sister who had attacked him. The New Testament treats Israel's rebellion in the wilderness as written for our instruction and warning (1 Corinthians 10:10–11; Jude 8–11; Hebrews 13:17). How does this account both warn us against despising God-given leadership and point us to Christ, the meek and greater Servant who prayed for those who wronged Him?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring the whole chapter to its center and let it lead to Christ. Moses is the picture: the meekest man on earth, attacked by his own family, refusing to defend himself, vindicated by God, and then praying for the very ones who wronged him. Every line of that picture points beyond Moses to a greater Servant.

Jesus is meekness itself. Come unto me, He says, for I am meek and lowly in heart. When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23). Like Moses, He would not grasp for vindication but entrusted His cause to the Father.

And like Moses crying Heal her now, Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Moses interceded for a sister; Christ interceded for the world, and lives still to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). The meek mediator of Numbers 12 is a small portrait of the great Mediator.

But the chapter also warns. People in covenant with God still rebelled and were disciplined. This is no abstract lesson. It calls us to take heed how we speak of God's servants, to fear the Lord, and to be formed into the meekness and forgiving love of Christ. Israel is the warning; Christ is the goal.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moses' meekness foreshadows Christ, who was meek and lowly and reviled not again (1 Peter 2:23).
- Moses' intercession for Miriam foreshadows Christ's prayer for His enemies and His ongoing intercession (Hebrews 7:25).
- Wilderness rebellion warns even those in covenant with God to take heed (1 Corinthians 10:11–12).
- The goal is not merely to silence critics but to be formed into Christlike meekness and forgiveness.
- Honoring God's servants and fearing the Lord guard us from the sin of Miriam and Aaron.

### Discussion Prompts

- In what specific ways does Moses in this chapter point us to the Lord Jesus?
- What does it mean that Christ, when reviled, reviled not again, and how is that possible for us?
- How does keeping both the warning and the example of Christ before us change the way we live this week?

## Question 10

### Student Question:

*Name one specific way Jesus, the meekest of all and the one who interceded even from the cross, is forming meekness in you right now: a complaint you need to lay down, a person you need to forgive, or a prayer you need to pray for someone who has hurt you.*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

The final movement is personal. It is not enough to admire Moses or to condemn Miriam from a safe distance. The Spirit means to form Christ's meekness in us. The question is no longer what they did in the wilderness, but what He is doing in our hearts now.

Perhaps there is a complaint you have been nursing, a grievance against someone in authority that has been quietly hardening into resentment. The call is to lay it down, to stop airing it, to bring it honestly to God instead of to other people.

Perhaps there is a person you need to forgive, someone whose words or actions wounded you, and the meekness of Christ is inviting you to release them rather than wait for them to grovel. Moses did not wait for Miriam to make it right; he prayed the moment the need arose.

Or perhaps the Spirit is putting a name on your heart, someone who has hurt you, and the next faithful step is simply to pray for them as Moses prayed, Heal her now. Whatever the specific form, the aim is the same: a heart so secure in Christ that it no longer needs to defend itself, and a love that intercedes even for those who wrong it.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual formation moves us from admiring meekness to embodying it.
- A nursed grievance against authority must be laid down and brought to God, not aired to others.
- Christlike forgiveness does not wait for the offender to grovel.
- Praying for those who hurt us is a concrete mark of growth in Christ.
- The goal is a heart so secure in Christ it no longer needs to defend itself.

### Discussion Prompts

- What complaint or grievance is the Lord asking you to lay down this week?

- Is there someone you need to forgive before they have asked, as Moses interceded for Miriam?
- Whose name is on your heart to pray for, and will you actually do it?