



## Repeated Rebellion (part 2)

### Numbers 32:11-12

#### 1. Rebellion (verse 11)

#### 2. Hope (verse 12)

If any of you are familiar at all with the sport boxing, you know well the name of Mike Tyson. Born in 1966 to a single mother in Brooklyn, New York, he was in trouble with the law from an early age. During a stay in a juvenile reform center, Mike began to discover his great boxing talent. After only 26 amateur fights, he turned pro in 1985 and won his first 15 fights by knockout. In 1986, he claimed the World Boxing Council (WBC) heavyweight crown by knocking out Trevor Berbick. The next year (in 1987), he earned the World Boxing Association (WBA) title and the International Boxing Federation (IBF) crown. He was the undisputed heavyweight boxing champion of the world. For the next two years, Mike Tyson successfully defended his crowns six times. He was on top of the world, with a 37-0 record. And then, his world began to cave in.

His behavior went from the sinful to the bizarre. His marriage to Robin Givens began to crumble. In 1990, he lost a surprising match to James "Buster" Douglas and lost his titles. And though he recovered from this loss to win four more boxing matches, he was convicted of rape and spent three years in prison before being able to regain any of his crowns. When released from prison in 1995, Tyson was able to regain two of his three crowns. But, was knocked out by Evander Holyfield for only the second loss of his career. When he had a rematch, he bit a chunk off of Holyfield's ear. He wasn't disqualified from the match until he bit an even bigger chunk off of Holyfield's other ear. This caused him to be banned from boxing for a year and pay a \$3 million fine.

After serving his ban, Tyson had trouble getting a license to fight again in several different states, as the governing boards for boxing were doubtful as to what he might do in the ring. In 1999, he again spent prison time. This time it was nine months on an assault charge. Though he did go on to win six more fights over the next three years, he was never able to regain any of his crowns, nor his former glory.

In 2003, Mike Tyson declared bankruptcy, even though his career earnings have been estimated to be in the area of \$400 million! (That's a lot of spending!) His comeback attempts have all failed. He officially retired in 2005. Today, Tyson is a disgraced man. Though earning hundreds of millions of dollars, Mike Tyson has made some poor decisions and engaged in much sinful activity. He has wasted his life. About a year ago, Tyson, himself, admitted, "My whole life has been a waste - I've been a failure" [\[1\]](#) Many agree with his own assessment. He has lived a wasted life.

This morning, in our exposition through the entire Bible, we come to another story of lives wasted: the book of Numbers. The people of Israel had great opportunity. They saw the mighty power of God displayed like no other generation has ever seen. God was working with them to accomplish great things through them. But, they wasted their lives. They had every opportunity to place their faith in the LORD and follow Him fully and enjoy tremendous blessings! But, alas, they refused to trust in the LORD. Instead, they tested the LORD and tried Him and grumbled and complained against Him. As a result, the LORD dealt bitterly with them. Rather than conquering the promised land, they died in the wilderness.

Last week, we looked at the turning point in the book of Numbers, which comes in chapters 13-14, found in the middle of the book. These chapters tell the story of how Moses sent out twelve spies to spy out the land of Canaan from Kadesh-Barnea (Num. 32:8). When the spies returned, ten of them brought back a bad report of the land (Num. 13:32). But two of them, Joshua and Caleb, brought back a good report (Num. 14:6-9). Sadly, the congregation of Israel chose to believe the bad report that the ten spies gave, rather than believing the good report of Joshua and Caleb. In so doing, they refused to enter the land.

In their refusal, the patience of the LORD had reached its limit. He had put up with their fears of Pharaoh's army in front of the sea (Ex. 14). He had been patient when they grumbled and complained to him about lacking water to drink and food to eat (Ex. 15-17). He endured their idolatry when they worshiped the golden calf (Ex. 32). He was gracious to them when they were discontent in the wilderness (Num. 11). But, with their refusal to enter the land, the LORD had enough. In Numbers 14:22-23, we read a pivotal passage in which the LORD pronounced a sentence of judgement against the people of Israel. In these verses, the LORD told Moses, ...

Numbers 14:22-23

"Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of these who spurned Me see it."

In my message to you last week, I opened up for you ten different times in which the people rebelled against the LORD. (There were more we could have examined, but we chose ten, because that's what the text says: "these ten times.") Last week, we spent a considerable amount of time looking at the "repeated rebellion" of the people of Israel.

This morning, we will be looking at the last half of the book of Numbers. Our text spans from chapters 15-36. And do you know what we discover? We discover the exact same thing with the people of Israel. Their rebellion against the LORD continued in the wilderness. After hearing God's judgment upon them, the people of Israel didn't mend their ways. There was no repentant heart. Knowing the gracious character of God, they should have known that in wrath, God may well have been merciful, should they have sought His mercy. But they didn't. In fact, as I studied the book of Numbers this week, I found that they rebelled against the LORD another "ten times" (14:22) even after God's judgement upon them was pronounced.

My message this morning is appropriately entitled, "Repeated, Rebellion, (part 2)." My outline this morning will come from the following two verses:

Numbers 32:11-12

"None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have followed the LORD fully."

My outline this week has two points. The first comes from verse 11 and the second comes from verse 12. Verse 11 speaks about "Rebellion." Verse 12 speaks about "Hope." In my first point, we are going to look at the many times in which Israel rebelled against the Lord after the events of the spies. To this first point, there will be ten sub-points, as I have selected ten different occasions for their My message this morning will finish with a brief look at the hope that we have in Joshua's example. For, he followed the LORD "fully" (32:12).

Now, at this point in my message, you may well be experiencing *Déjà vu*, that is, the experience of thinking that you have gone through a similar situation previously. And indeed you have. Last week, I began my message using an illustration of one who was incredibly gifted by God with athletic ability. And yet, through choices made, he failed in all of the opportunities presented to him.

Furthermore, the outline of my message is exactly the same as it was last week. The aim of my message is exactly the same as it was last week. The method of my message is exactly the same as it was last week. Because, the message of the book of Numbers is the same throughout! It's a message about a continuously rebellious people.

In my study of the text this week, I searched in attempts to find some other theme that dominates the second half of the book of Numbers, but the theme continued the same. I feel compelled to preach to you a message very similar to last week. I'm reminded about the story of the pastor who was called to serve at a local church. On the Sunday of his arrival the congregation gathered excitedly and expectantly. Everyone was suitably impressed afterward. "My, how well he spoke" remarked one. "A superb sermon to be sure. If he keeps this up we're in for a treat" remarked another. Keep it up the new pastor did. For the following week he preached exactly the same sermon. The people were puzzled, but generously surmised that it had probably been too busy a week to prepare a new sermon, what with moving into a new house and meeting all the people. Yet he preached the original sermon the following week as well, and the week after that. The people were very concerned, and the church leadership decided it was time to confront their new pastor. They met him after the service and asked whether he had any other sermons or whether he planned to preach the same one for his entire ministry. "I certainly hope not" said the pastor. "I plan to begin a new one when you start putting into practice the first."

As the LORD has lead us to go through the entire Bible in our preaching this year, I trust that His sovereign hand is upon us. I believe that He has a message for us to hear. Perhaps those of you who were here last week didn't get it the first time and need a gentle reminder. Perhaps you missed last week and need to hear it this week. Perhaps there are those who heard it last week, who cannot be here the morning. At any rate, the application questions that we are dealing with this morning are simple: "Do you grumble? Do you complain? Do you distrust the LORD? Are you rebellious toward His ways?"

Before we dig into the last half of the book of Numbers, I need to remind you once again that the book of Numbers is teaching us by negative example. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul used several examples of the grumbings and rebellions of the people in Numbers and said, "These things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. ... These things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:6, 11). When Paul talks about "these things" happening, they happened in the book of Numbers!

Many future boxers will be told the story of Mike Tyson and hold him up as a model of what not to do should your boxing career meet with some success. That is how the book of Numbers is used in the New Testament. We are to look to them and realize that God hated their rebellion against Him. That is how I will use the book for one more message this morning. And so, as you see the rebellion of the people of Israel, you should take it to heart and examine your own heart as well.

Like last week, I'm not going to spend much time on application. I will simply point out these ten times in which Israel rebelled against Moses and Aaron and against the LORD and trust the Holy Spirit to apply the truth into your hearts. When convicted of your sin in any of the episodes, I encourage you to look to Christ for help to change. Let's look at our first point this morning....

## **1. Rebellion (verse 11)**

Under this head, we're going to look at ten times in which the people of Israel rebelled against the LORD. The first rebellion comes in chapter 14. I'm calling this, ...

### **Rebellion #1 - The Presumptuous Rebellion (14:44)**

This rebellion comes in the context of the spies coming back and persuading the people not to enter the land. Once the LORD pronounced his sentence upon them that everyone in the generation (twenty years and older) would die in the wilderness (Num. 14:29), these ten spies

died by a plague (14:37). In verse 39, we find Moses telling the people of Israel of what God had decreed would happen to them. We read, ...

Numbers 14:39-40

When Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly. In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, "Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised."

You have to love their heart. They began to realize how serious their error was and how wrong they were to doubt the LORD. He had instructed them to go up, but they had refused. When the discipline of the LORD came down upon the spies, they realized the error of their ways. They realized that the LORD was giving them this land. They realized that the LORD was able to smite the nations as easily as He brought this plague upon the unbelieving spies. In verse 40, they confessed, "we have indeed sinned." And so, they were willing to go up and take the land. But, their confession came too late.

Numbers 14:41-43

But Moses said, "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed? Do not go up, or you will be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the LORD. And the LORD will not be with you."

With these words, we find Moses correcting their wrong thinking. Yes, God had told them previously to go and take the land. But, it all had changed because of their earlier refusal. The LORD had withdrawn His promise and would not go with them. Without the LORD, it would mean defeat (see the repeated emphasis of this in verses 42-43). Sadly, we seen them spurning the warning of Moses once again. In verse 44 we read that "they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses left the camp." The people of Israel had rebelled earlier. And now, their delayed obedience was really disobedience. Two wrongs don't make a right. And we see that "the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down, and struck them and beat them down as far as Hormah."

The error of their ways here is that they were presumptuous. They assumed that the LORD would bless their labors, because of a previous promise that was made to them. But, Moses had made it clear that the promise had been retracted. They presumed upon the LORD. And it was rebellion. Those who went up to fight paid the consequences, as many "fell by the sword" (verse 43).

## **Rebellion #2 - The Sabbath Rebellion (15:32)**

This story is quite simple. It comes in chapter 15, verse 32, "Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the sabbath day."

To us, such an activity may not sound to be like such a big deal. Some of us wouldn't think twice about gathering wood on the sabbath day. But, it was for them. In fact, this was such an obvious offense that ...

Numbers 15:33-34

Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation; and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him.

In other words, this man was imprisoned for his little deed, awaiting the sentence that would come upon him. The whole nation came to a halt on the Sabbath. Any work that was done in that day was clearly an act of high-handed rebellion against the LORD. As such it brought a capital offense.

Numbers 15:35-36

Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

## **Rebellion #3 - The Jealous Rebellion (16:3)**

Of all the rebellions that take place in the book of Numbers, this is perhaps the most famous. It involves Korah, Dathan and Abiram. The context picks up nicely in the first three verse of chapter 16.

Numbers 16:1-3

Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took action, and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown. They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"

Korah was the instigator of this rebellion. In verse 1, we see that he was a son of Levi. As a result, he was one of the Levites involved with

the sacred duties of the tabernacle. Within the Levites, there were several divisions. The first was the sons of Aaron. They were involved in the priestly duties. The second was the sons of Kohath. They were responsible for carrying the articles that were in the tabernacle: The ark of the covenant, the table of showbread, the lampstand, the golden altar (Num. 4:5-15). The third division was comprised of the sons of Gershon. They were responsible for the curtains of the tabernacle (Num. 4:21-28). The fourth division was the sons of Merari. They were responsible for the boards and bars of the tabernacle (Num. 4:29-33).

In verse 1, we find out that Korah was a son of Kohath, which meant that he and his other relatives would carry the ark of the covenant (along with the other items in the tabernacle) as the people of Israel would follow the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire. However, he was prohibited from doing any of the priestly duties. But, apparently, this wasn't enough for Korah. He wanted more.

He made his dissatisfaction known among the sons of Israel. By the time he came to Moses and Aaron with the complaint, he some 250 men who had agreed with cause (verse 2). You can only imagine how this took place. Korah began speaking to others in the sanctuary asking them, "Don't you think that Moses and Aaron have gone a bit too far with things? They claim that they (and their sons) are the only ones who get to enter into the holy of holies. They and their sons are the only ones who get to offer up the sacrifices to the LORD our God. Aren't we all holy before the LORD? I'm a Kohathite, but that shouldn't stop me from presenting sacrifices, should it?" Certainly, some agreed with him and some didn't. But, through his grumbling, he was able to secure some 250 "men of renown" who were willing to stand against Moses in these things.

His complaint comes in verse 3, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the rest of the assembly of the LORD?" Ultimately, this complaint was against the wisdom of God, Himself. For, Aaron and Moses were simply carrying out the duties in accordance with what God had apportioned. It was only the sons of Aaron that were permitted in the holy of holies (Nu. 4:5-15). It was only the sons of Aaron that were permitted to burn incense before the LORD (Num. 16:40). But, Korah wanted more.

The results of this rebellion were tragic. Moses warned the congregation of Israel to "Get back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram" (Num. 16:24). Moses warned the people that the ground would "open its mouth and swallow them up with all that is theirs" (Num. 16:30). Moses was predicting an earthquake to display the power of God, so that the people would know that He set apart Moses and Aaron to these duties that Korah had wanted to do (Num. 16:36-40).

As a family, we had an opportunity to read through this portion of Scripture this week. As we came upon it, I asked my daughter to go and get a handful of Lego guys (i.e. little figurines that stand an inch tall each). She ran upstairs to get them. When she returned, I told everyone to get off the couch. I put these little figurines along the edge of one of the seat cushions. As we read the story, I pulled back the cushions, making these figurines fall into the couch. And then, I let go of the cushions, so they came back to look like normal. And then, we carried on with our reading. Our children thought that this was so cool that they wanted to do it again. And so, we read of how the earth "opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions" (Num. 16:32). Due to the interest of our children, we read this verse several times and reenacted what happened to Korah and his relatives.

My son heard clearly that the earth "opened its mouth and swallowed them up" (Num. 16:32). He wanted to know if the earth would have reached its tongue out and grabbed the people who were attempting to escape. I can only imagine what was going on in his little head, as he saw these big lips, like rolling hills, which looked like a mouth. It is my prayer that my children ought never to forget the severity with which the LORD looks upon rebellion. Similarly, it is my prayer that we as a church might never forget how much God hates rebellion.

#### **Rebellion #4 - The Accusing Rebellion (16:41)**

This rebellion took place the very next day, after Korah and his fellow grumblers were swallowed by the earth. In verse 41 we read, "But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You are the ones who have caused the death of the LORD's people.' What a crazy accusation to make! Korah and his friends were clearly dissatisfied with the way that things were going. They came to Moses with their grievances. And Moses simply setup a test to allow God to show who is right in the matter. He said, ...

Numbers 16:28-30

"By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these deeds; for this is not my doing. If these men die the death of all men or if they suffer the fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have spurned the LORD."

In other words, Moses gave them a little test. "Look at the sons of Korah. If they die like all other men died, then God didn't send me. But, if they die by a predicted earthquake, then surely the LORD is with me." And then, after saying these words, the earth opens its mouth and reaches out its tongue and swallows up everyone near the camp. And then, Moses gets blamed for the trouble!

The reason why they came with their complaints is because of a similar dissatisfaction in the way in which things have turned out. It's a bit like the Pharisees, who accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul (Matt. 12:24). It doesn't make sense. Moses doesn't have the power to create an earthquake. Rather, it is the LORD who has the power.

God became angry at their accusations and began to pour out His wrath upon these people. A plague broke out and people began to die. Only as Aaron took his censer, brought it into the middle of the assembly of the people and made atonement for their sins did the plague stop. This is told in verses 48-49, "[Aaron] took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was checked. But those who died by the plague were 14,700, besides those who died on account of Korah." You get the sense from these words that you could visibly see the plague making its way through the congregation. The people were falling. But, as Aaron ran into the midst with the censer, the plague went no further.

Again, I trust that you are impacted by the seriousness with which God takes grumbling. Almost 15,000 people died because they grumbled!

Before we look at the next rebellion, I want to show you what took place in chapter 17. In this chapter, God attempted to demonstrate to all the people who his leaders were, so that the people might not grumble any more against them.

Numbers 17:1-5

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and get from them a rod for each father's household: twelve rods, from all their leaders according to their fathers' households. You shall write each name on his rod, and write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi; for there is one rod for the head of each of their fathers' households. You shall then deposit them in the tent of meeting in front of the testimony, where I meet with you. It will come about that the rod of the man whom I choose will sprout. Thus I will lessen from upon Myself the grumbings of the sons of Israel, who are grumbling against you."

Do you get the picture? God says, "I want to decrease the amount of grumbling that is taking place among the sons of Israel. And so, I'm going to give you a test. You take a stick from each of the tribes of Israel. Write the names of the tribes upon each of these 12 sticks. Place them in front of the curtain going into the holy of holies and let them sit for a day. When you return, one of the rods will sprout. Look at the name written upon the stick. This is the one whom I am choosing to represent Myself."

And why did God do this? He wanted to curtail the grumbling in the camp! This is stated clearly in verse 5, "Thus I will lessen from upon Myself the grumbings of the sons of Israel." It ought to come as no surprise, then, that it was the stick that was labeled "Levi," that sprouted. So as to continue to decrease the rebellious grumbings, the LORD said to Moses (in verse 10), "Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put an end to their grumbings against Me, so that they will not die." Throughout the rest of the history of the nation of Israel, Aaron's rod that blossomed was kept safely in the ark of the covenant as a constant remembrance to the people of how much God hates grumbling. And yet, the grumbling continued on!

#### **Rebellion #5 - The Exasperated Rebellion (17:12-13)**

Numbers 17:12-13

Then the sons of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, "Behold, we perish, we are dying, we are all dying! Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, must die. Are we to perish completely?"

Such language is typical of grumblers. Once all of their objections have been answered and once they have been demonstrated to be wrong, it's not repentance that comes. It is exasperation. They take their correction to an extreme the other way in an effort to generate self-pity for themselves.

There is no comment about this in the text. But, I sense that it is an overreaction to what just took place. Five times in two verses, they talk about dying. "We perish ... we are dying ... we are all dying ... Everyone ... must die. ... are we to perish completely?" (verses 12-13). It's almost as if they threw their hands up in despair! "Nothing's going to change. In fact, I think that it's going to get worse! We are all going to die! If these things are really true, then we can't even come near the tabernacle, lest we die."

These things that were spoken obviously weren't true. It's not that everyone who came near to the tabernacle would die. To be sure, there were certain restrictions upon where people could go. But, it wasn't nearly as restrictive as the sons of Israel were seeking to make it be. This is typical of grumblers. When God clearly demonstrates what is true and what is not true, then they overreact and swing the other way and claim that their arms are now tied. They cannot do anything!

#### **Rebellion #6 - The Thirsty Rebellion (20:2)**

Numbers 20:2-5

There was no water for the congregation, and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron. The people thus contended with Moses and spoke, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! Why then have you brought the LORD'S assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here? Why have you made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink."

Déjà vu! They had encountered thirst on several other occasions. God had wondrously provided for them. Rather than believing that the LORD would provide for them again, they grumbled and contended with Moses. They questioned everything that Moses had done for them.

As I told you last week, they failed to **look back**, which would have driven them to **look up** to God in dependence upon Him to provide for them. They could have looked back upon the incident at Marah, where the bitter waters were made sweet (Ex. 15:22-27). They could have looked back to the time they were in a similar situation at Rephidim, when the LORD brought forth water for them out of the rock (Ex. 17:1-7). They could have even looked back to God's faithfulness that very morning, when the Manna faithfully came with the dew. And then, they could have come to Moses with a proper perspective and with a proper request. They well could have said, "Moses, the word in the camp is that we are almost completely out of water. Without water, we and our livestock will perish. But, we know that the LORD knows this. We know that the LORD has provided for us in the past. He has been faithful to us in times of need. He has clearly demonstrated His power for us, by redeeming us with the mighty plagues and then destroying Pharaoh's army. We are trusting that He will provide for us again in the future. Right now, we don't exactly know how He is going to do this. Could you please pray to Him on our behalf that He would show us where to get

water for our nation?"

That's how they should have prayed. But, they didn't. Rather, they came with a spirit of grumbling. I told you last week that these people had the gift of grumbling. Sure enough, it's being manifested here once again, as they brought up the Egypt thing again.

See, grumblers are never quite satisfied. They carry in their back pocket the things their favorite complaints. When a difficulty comes up, they will bring out their same old grievances. In this case, it was Egypt. "We had it better in Egypt than we are having right here! Why did you bring us out of Egypt! We liked it better back then! The food was good. We had plenty to drink. We should never have left. We should have remained as slaves. At least in Egypt we were able to drink the water! Slavery is better than thirst!"

But God, in His amazing and abundant grace provided a solution to the situation. In verse 8, God told Moses to "take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink."

It's at this point, Moses broke. He became impatient with them. He addressed them with angry words, which reflected poorly upon the holiness of God. I'm calling this ...

### **Rebellion #7 - The Unholy Rebellion (20:12)**

Numbers 20:9-10

So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?"

With these words, Moses was playing their game. They had brought him down to resort to complaining as well. A spiritual leader can't be a grumbler. When reproving those who are wrong, he "must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, ... patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:24-25). Rather than being kind and patient and gentle, Moses spoke to them in His anger: "Listen now, you rebels!"

But there was another problem with what Moses did. He acted in such a way as to bring low the holiness of God.

Numbers 20:11-12

Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

Moses was told to speak to the rock (verse 8). But, Moses hit the rock twice. And God was not well pleased with him. Not only did Moses not believe God. But, Moses failed to treat God as holy before the congregation. There is a bit of discussion as to the exact nature of the offense of Moses. It may have been that Moses struck the rock, rather than speaking to it as the LORD had told him. I have heard others say that it was because Moses struck the rock twice, rather than once. Or, perhaps it was because Moses claimed the power for himself to be able to generate the water out of the rock, thereby reducing the holiness of God.

Regardless of the particular reason, Moses knew what it was that he did wrong and that he would pay the penalty of such a decision. He would not be able to enter into the promised land with the people of Israel. Like the rest of the congregation, He would die before the forty years of wandering was finished.

### **Rebellion #8 - The Impatient Rebellion (21:4-5)**

This rebellion begins in verse 4, "Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey." Surely, the people of Israel thought that they were going in circles, because, in fact, they were! They are back now at the Red Sea, which is close to Egypt! In chapter 14, they were on the precipice of the promised land. They were on the ridge, almost able to look over and see it. And now, they are back to where they started!

It's no wonder that they were impatient. And yet, as has been their pattern, they responded most inappropriately. In verse 5 we find the people speaking against God and Moses saying, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food."

Again, they pull out their favorite complaining card. "Why did we ever leave Egypt? Did you bring us out here to die?" They also remind Moses (and God) of the food thing. They sound like college kids complaining about the cafeteria food, "we loath this miserable food." To make matters worse, they made everything the fault of Moses! "Why did you bring us back here?" They should have realized that it was their own falt that they had been brought back to the Red Sea.

God was not at all please with them at this point. So, he sent the "fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died" (Num. 21:6).

Oh, how often has God met these times of rebellion with death of those involved. When the people presumed to be able to defeat the Amalekites, they died (Num. 14:43). When the man gathered wood on the Sabbath, he died (Num. 15:35). When Korah and his friends rebelled against the Lord, they died (Num. 16:33). When the people grumbled that Moses was responsible for their deaths, 14,700 were killed

by the plague (Num. 16:49). When Moses struck the rock, the sentence of death was placed upon him (Num. 20:12). And now, the people were dying by the fiery serpents. "Many people of Israel died" (verse 6).

To their credit, the people confessed their sin. We read about their confession in verse 7, "So the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.' And Moses interceded for the people." I can't help but to think of Pharaoh when I hear their repentance. Only when circumstances turned sour did they confess their sin. Pharaoh sought to find relief, rather than a change of heart. I suspect that this is what took place in the hearts of these people.

It's at this point that some light begins to shine through in a dark place. The light comes, not so much because the people repented. But, the light comes because of the manner in which God decreed to allow these people to live.

Numbers 21:8-9

The LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

This is a great picture of the cross. When the people in the wilderness were bitten, they simply needed to look to the serpent that was set on a standard and they would live. There weren't any special anointings. There weren't any special prayers. There weren't any special sacrifices. There weren't any special rituals to go through. It was all just a look to the serpent and they were healed.

This is the way that the cross of Christ works in our lives. We have all been bitten by the serpent of sin. We are all sick and needy of healing. The way of salvation is by looking to the cross of Christ. You don't need to have any special anointings. You don't need to have any special prayers. You don't need to have any special ritual. It's a look to the cross that saves you. It's a look of faith, trusting that His sacrifice was sufficient to atone for your sins!

Perhaps you remember the night in which he came to Jesus and had the discussion about how you can be born again when you are very old. At one point in the conversation, Jesus told Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

Have you identified yourself at all with the people of Israel? Have you seen their attitudes and actions to be your attitudes and actions? Then, by all means, look to Christ! This is how Charles Spurgeon found life. In his autobiography, he writes, ...

In my conversion, the very point lay in making the discovery that I had nothing to do but to look to Christ, and I should be saved. ... The good news that I was, as a sinner, to look away from myself to Christ, as much startled me, and came as fresh to me, as any news I ever heard in my life. Had I never read my Bible? Yes, and read it earnestly. Had I never been taught by Christian people? Yes, I had, by mother, and father, and others. Had I not heard the gospel? Yes, I think I had; and yet, somehow, it was like a new revelation to me that I was to "believe and live"

When, for the first time I received the gospel to my soul's salvation I thought that I had never really heard it before, and I began to think that the preachers to whom I had listened had not truly preached it. But, on looking back, I am inclined to believe that I had heard the gospel fully preached many hundreds of times before, and that this was the difference--that I then heard it as though I heard it not; and when I did hear it, the message may not have been any more clear in itself than it had been at former times, but the power of the Holy Spirit was present to open my ear, and to guide the message to my heart. I have no doubt that I heard, scores of times, such texts as these--"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;" "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth;" "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" yet I had no intelligent idea of what faith meant. [\[2\]](#)

Like Charles Spurgeon, I encourage you to hear it for the first time: "Look to Christ!" Do you believe in Him? Look to Jesus and be saved from your sins (Isa. 45:22).

## **Rebellion #9 - The Immoral Rebellion (25:1)**

Numbers 25:1-3

While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel.

Over and over and over again, God had proven Himself to be the LORD Almighty. It was the LORD who was the power behind the plagues (Ex. 7-11). It was the LORD who selectively killed the firstborn in Egypt (Ex. 12). It was the LORD who split the Red Sea (Ex. 14). It was the LORD who made the bitter water sweet (Ex. 15). It was the LORD who provided the Manna each morning for years (Ex. 16). It was the LORD who cause the water to flow from the rock (Ex. 17). It was the LORD who opened up the earth to swallow Korah (Num. 16). It was the LORD who healed those who looked to the bronze serpent (Num. 21). And yet, the people of Israel followed after Baal of Peor. After seeing the true God so clearly, they went after a false god. This is bold rebellion.

As might be expected, this angered the LORD. In the Ten Commandments, God had said, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any

likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Ex. 20:4-6).

In this case, it was the jealous wrath of the LORD that came against the Israelites.

Numbers 25:4-6

The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor. Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

People were weeping over the deaths that were occurring as a result of their worship of Baal of Peor. During their mourning, Zimri the son of Salu (Num. 25:14) struts into his tent to sleep with a Midianite woman, a blatant demonstration of his rebellion. It was too much for Phinehas to take. We are told in that ...

Numbers 25:7-9

When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. Those who died by the plague were 24,000.

It was a sad time in the life of Israel. There was idolatry and immorality in the camp! The LORD was dealing with their sin with His wrath.

### **Rebellion #10 - The Partial Rebellion (31:14-16)**

Just before the generation was to die out in the wilderness, they had one last task to perform. In Numbers 31:2, we are told that the LORD had instructed them to "take full vengeance for the sons of Israel on the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered to your people." The Midianites, if you remember, were those who had caused 24,000 people to die in the "Immoral Rebellion." They were to be entirely wiped out!

So, Moses gathered a thousand men from each tribe to go to war against them. Twelve thousand men total went up against them. They killed every male (verse 7). They killed all of the kings (verse 8). They killed Balaam the son of Beor (verse 10). They burned all their cities with fire (verse 10). They burned all their camps with fire (verse 10). But, ... "The sons of Israel captured the women of Midian and their little ones" (verse 9).

When Moses found out about this, "He was angry with the officers of the army." He said, "Have you spared all the women? Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the LORD."

I'm calling this "The Partial Rebellion," because they were only partially obedient. From the response of Moses, you can tell what they were to do. They were to fully destroy everyone in the city. But, they didn't. They left the women alive. Here was their final opportunity to be obedient to the LORD, and they failed. Soon after that, the last of the remaining generation would die in the wilderness. It's a sad ending to a generation that failed to follow the LORD fully. We have come now to our text in chapter 32...

Numbers 32:11-12

None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have followed the LORD fully.

It's quite an understatement to say that they "did not follow the LORD fully." Last week, we looked at ten different occasions when they rebelled against the LORD.

- Rebellion #1 - "The Red Sea Rebellion" (Ex. 14:11-12)
- Rebellion #2 - "The Bitter Water Rebellion" (Ex. 15:24)
- Rebellion #3 - "The Hunger Rebellion" (Ex. 16:2-3)
- Rebellion #4 - "The Hoarding Rebellion" (Ex. 16:20)
- Rebellion #5 - "The Sabbath Rebellion" (Ex. 16:27)
- Rebellion #6 - "The Thirst Rebellion" (Ex. 17:2-3)
- Rebellion #7 - "The Golden Calf Rebellion" (Ex. 17:2-3)
- Rebellion #8 - "The General Rebellion" (Num. 11:1-3)
- Rebellion #9 - "The Discontent Rebellion" (Num. 11:4-6)
- Rebellion #10 - "The Faith Rebellion" (Num. 14:1-4)

This week, we saw ten more occasions for their rebellion.



Rebellion #1 - The Presumptuous Rebellion (14:44).  
Rebellion #2 - The Sabbath Rebellion (15:32).  
Rebellion #3 - The Jealous Rebellion (16:3).  
Rebellion #4 - The Accusing Rebellion (16:41).  
Rebellion #5 - The Exasperated Rebellion (17:12-13).  
Rebellion #6 - The Thirsty Rebellion (20:2).  
Rebellion #7 - The Unholy Rebellion (20:12).  
Rebellion #8 - The Impatient Rebellion (21:4-5).  
Rebellion #9 - The Immoral Rebellion (25:1).  
Rebellion #10 - The Partial Rebellion (31:14-16).

The book of Numbers is very dark. But, there is hope. Are you longing for the hope this morning? It comes in the example of Joshua. It comes in verse 12.

## 2. Hope (verse 12)

Last week, it was the example of Caleb that encouraged us. This week, it is the example of Joshua that will encourage us. We read in verse 12 that "Joshua ... followed the LORD fully." This simply means that his heart "followed hard after God" (Ps. 63:8). When the LORD gave a command, Joshua engaged his heart to the max. If there was a cup to be filled, Joshua filled it to the top. If there was a journey to ride, Joshua rode it until the end. If there was a job to do, Joshua didn't stop until it was finished. That's the idea that we get.

It's not that Joshua was sinless. In the book of Joshua, we read about how he failed to pray and as a result was deceived by the Gibeonites (Joshua 9). It's not that Joshua earned anything before God. It's simply that Joshua was a devoted follower of God, who didn't have a grumbling, rebellious heart, like the rest of his relatives. His faith was in God. His support was for Moses.

When the people were fearful at the Red Sea, Joshua was filled with faith. When the people grumbled at the sour water, Joshua was grateful for how far the LORD had brought until that day. When the people were hungry and thirsty for food and water, Joshua was hungering and thirsting after righteousness. When the people were worshiping the golden calf, Joshua was walking with the LORD. When the people were discontent in their circumstances, Joshua was devoted to God's will. When the people backed away from entering the land, Joshua believed that the LORD would fight for them. When the people were suspicious of Moses, Joshua was supportive of Moses. When the people accused Moses of wrong, Joshua acquitted him. When the people were exasperated with what lies ahead, Joshua was excited about the future. When the people were tired, Joshua was tenacious. When the people were immoral, Joshua was irreproachable.

This is the sort of man that the LORD is looking for. Listen to 2 Chronicles 16:9, "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His." Joshua was one of these men. The key to the success of Joshua is found in chapter 27, verse 18. When it came time to figure out who would succeed Moses in leading the people into the land, Joshua was chosen to be that man. It says in verse 18 that Joshua was "a man in whom is the Spirit." This is the key to the life of Joshua. He was a Spirit-filled man. The Spirit of God had come upon him and moved in Him in great ways. Do you want to know how it was that Joshua was able to follow the LORD fully? It was because the Spirit of God was fully leading him.

As I bring my message to a close this morning, I simply ask you, "Do you want to be like the rebellious people of the house of Israel? Or, do you want to be like Joshua?" Joshua had the opportunity to see God work in great ways. In Joshua 2, we read the story of how he led the Israelites to march around the city of Jericho and eventually witnessed the walls falling outward before them. Joshua prayed and the sun stood still (Joshua 10:13). Joshua was privileged to lead the people into the promised land in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12).

The generation of Moses' day was cursed and laid low in the wilderness, but Joshua had the opportunity to lead the people of God into the promised land. What was the difference? Joshua was a Spirit-filled man. When the people rebelled, Joshua's heart was soft. When the people complained, Joshua believed.

Oh, how we need the Spirit to come among us and lead us and guide us and sanctify us. Rock Valley Bible Church will only go forward as the Spirit dwells among us and stirs our hearts to love Jesus Christ and live consistently in that love.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 19, 2006 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] This quote was on the front page of June 3, 2005 USA Today.

[2] Charles Spurgeon, The Early Years, pp. 84-85.