

## **Overcoming the Problem of Bitterness Numbers 12**

### **Introduction:**

1. Tonight, we will examine an Old Testament story. It is the story of Miriam and Aaron (brother and sister of Moses) and how they responded to Moses in Numbers 12.
2. This story teaches us some valuable principles about the problem of bitterness.
3. We will also tie in New Testament references to substantiate our teachings.

### **What is bitterness?**

1. A past grudge
  - There are people I have known that have carried grudges for 30 years. They can still tell you in detail about what happened and how they were done wrong.
2. A present resentment
  - A past grudge can turn into an ever-present resentment.
  - They picked up that grudge, threw it on their shoulders and it has been carried with them ever since. Everywhere they go, they take it with them.  
**Illustration:** A backpack full of rocks.
3. A refusal to forgive
  - They won't drop the backpack. In their mind, this would be a sign of weakness, or an admission that they were wrong and the other person was right.
  - The Bible is clear. The opposite of bitterness is forgiveness. Ephesians 4:31-32

### **Why do we become bitter?**

1. We focus on the actions of others. Numbers 12:1
  - The key word is "*focus*." Bitterness is usually not sudden, it is subtle.
  - A person does something and we focus, dwell, and meditate on it. The more we dwell on it, the more we become angry and bitter. Miriam and Aaron allowed this thing to fester in their hearts. They focused on what they thought were wrong actions by Moses.
  - By the time we're done, we know not only what they did, but why they did it! We read between the lines and we know their purpose and their motives, and we are mad! Of course we have taken our eyes off of Christ.
  - Bitterness begins as a seed, then takes root and spreads like cancer throughout our entire being, and we can infect others with it. Hebrews 12:15
2. We become prideful in our hearts. Numbers 12:2a; cf. Proverbs 13:10
  - They basically said, "Who does Moses think he is?" The middle letter in "pride" is the letter "I." We say things like, "I was done wrong. I don't deserve that. I deserve better. I don't appreciate that."

- Pride won't allow us to admit where we may have been wrong, or where we may have responded wrongly, or misjudged.
  - Pride leads us to bitterness. We feel that we are above being treated in such a way. "How dare they treat me that way!"
3. Jealousy overtakes us. Numbers 12:2b
- "Why did he get that position and not me? I am as qualified as he is."
  - "Why do they always have the money for nice things and we struggle to just pay the bills? Why do they drive a new car and I drive this old clunker?"
  - These items of jealousy can easily and quickly turn into bitterness. We begin to resent the success, money, possessions, or position of others.

### **Who is bitterness most likely to be directed towards?**

1. Those to whom we have done or given the most
  - Miriam helped to rescue Moses as a baby (Exodus 2:1-10). Can't you just hear her saying, "I helped raise that boy and now he's embarrassed us by marrying that woman. After all I've done for him."
  - Even though we try to give to others with the attitude of "no strings attached," in reality it is very hard to have no expectations. It's easy until someone we have given to wrongs us.
  - It is so easy to get the attitude, "I've done all this for him and look how he has treated me."
2. Those in authority
  - Moses was the spiritual leader of Israel. It is easy to get bitter at those in authority (spiritual leaders, boss at work, parents).
  - Maybe we don't like the decisions they make. Maybe we feel we should be the leader.
  - Because leaders are in the public spotlight, we can tend to see their faults very quickly. We forget they are human. We feel like we are as smart and gifted as they are. "Who are they to tell me what to do?" Bitterness can creep in.
3. Those who are in our family (spiritual family too)
  - We live with them and have to see their faults on a daily basis. Thus the reason for passages that Paul gave to the family, like Colossians 3:18-21.
  - A wife can get bitter and decide not to follow her husband's leadership, the husband can, in turn, get bitter at his wife, children can get filled with anger and bitterness towards their parents, etc.
  - Sibling rivalries are natural, yet very carnal and motivated by pride. It is very easy for pride and jealousy to take over in a marriage.
  - We expect love and understanding from family. We have high expectations. When we are done wrong, it hurts very deeply, and bitterness can result.

- Probably 90% of our bitterness problems fall into one of these three categories: someone we were once close to, someone in authority, or someone in our family.

### **What does bitterness lead to?**

1. Division – Numbers 12:4-5
  - When we get bitter, we create a division between us and the person we're bitter at. It can't help but happen. We build walls that separate and divide.
  - We can try to be a hypocrite and cover it, but the bitter vibes are there. Ever been bitter at another person and tried to hide it? Isn't that a great feeling?
2. God's displeasure – Numbers 12:6-11
  - God cannot and will not condone bitterness. It grieves the Holy Spirit. God is never going to say, "You know, you're right. Stay bitter. You've got a right." Ephesians 4:30-32
  - Was Moses right or wrong? That wasn't the issue with God. The issue was envy, jealousy, and bitterness.
3. Physical sickness – Numbers 12:10
  - Bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.
  - I realize that, in our text, this was a direct judgment from God, but there is still a good practical application for us. Bitterness is a form of stress, and it can destroy you physically and put you in an early grave.
4. Loss of joy and isolation – Numbers 12:15a
  - Who do you hurt the most when you are bitter? Yourself! You are allowing that other person to control you.
5. Hindrance to your Christian walk – Numbers 12:15b
  - Miriam brought herself and all the people to a standstill.
  - Your Bible reading becomes mechanical, prayer is lifeless, and your service for the Lord is fleshly. Before you can move on and begin to grow again, the bitterness must be dealt with.