

Day 159 - THURSDAY: May 18th

Numbers 12

Numbers 12:1-16 NKJV

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. So they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it. (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.) Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses?" So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed. And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper. So Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned. Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb!" So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "Please heal her, O God, I pray!" Then the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterward she may be received again." So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in again. And afterward the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the

Wilderness of Paran.

Daily Deep Dive:

“Resisting God-ordained authority has been as common a temptation as presuming to *speak* for God when not appointed to do so. Often in the case of sedition and rebellion, we see both. And in chapter 12, we find *Miriam and Aaron* doing both. Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth (verse 3)—a note probably inserted by Joshua or a later biblical editor to put the challenge against Moses in perspective. And this humble man patiently waited on the Lord to intervene and uphold him. He did nothing to refute his sister and brother.

People who are jealous of someone will often run them down, which is what Miriam and Aaron proceed to do. They start by attacking him over "the Ethiopian [or Cushite] woman whom he had married" (verse 1). Many have built theories on this accusation. We have no other record in Scripture of the woman mentioned here, for the only wife we do know of, Zipporah, was a Midianite. Thus, we cannot know for sure when Moses married this woman. It is possible that he married her decades earlier while a prince in Egypt, after winning a victory against Ethiopia, as this is

what Josephus records. This first-century Jewish historian refers to her as Tharbis, daughter of the king of Ethiopia (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 2, chap. 10). Moses may have retrieved her when he returned to Egypt to free the Israelites—we simply do not know. In any case, there is no record of God issuing any criticism of Moses in this circumstance. Indeed, God exonerates Moses as being faithful in all His house (verse 7).

But do not Miriam and Aaron also speak for God? Is not their disapproval sanctioned by Him? The question is even raised as to whether Moses was unique in his role as the one through whom God communicated. At the very least, Miriam and Aaron wanted to have an equal say with Moses. Perhaps it was jealousy, perhaps it was pride, perhaps a family argument. They convinced themselves that they had a valid claim—after all, Miriam was a prophetess (Exodus 15:20) and God spoke to Aaron, too (Leviticus 10:8; Leviticus 11:1; Leviticus 13:1; Exodus 6:13; Exodus 12:1; etc.). God does, then, speak to all three of them. Yet, while exonerating Moses, He comes down hard on Miriam and Aaron. Miriam, it appears, may have been the instigator of the criticisms of Moses, as her name is mentioned first (verse 1) and the principal punishment befalls her (verses

10, 14). Remarkably, Moses' wonderful character shines through as he intercedes for his brother and sister despite the personal betrayal he must have felt.” [END]

Verse 1 – As mentioned above, there are a number of theories on this verse. Here are a couple that connect that this Ethiopian would be the same as Zipporah the Midianite. JFB commentary states its theory as: “*Hebrew*, “a Cushite woman” – Arabia was usually called in Scripture the land of Cush, its inhabitants being descendants of that son of Ham (see on Exo_2:15) and being accounted generally a vile and contemptible race (see on Amo_9:7). The occasion of this seditious outbreak on the part of Miriam and Aaron against Moses was the great change made in the government by the adoption of the seventy rulers [Num_11:16]. Their irritating disparagement of his wife (who, in all probability, was Zipporah [Exo_2:21], and not a second wife he had recently married) arose from jealousy of the relatives, through whose influence the innovation had been first made (Exo_18:13–26), while they were overlooked or neglected. Miriam is mentioned before Aaron as being the chief instigator and leader of the sedition.” [END]

Adam Clarke’s commentary states a similar view: “It appears that jealousy of the power and influence of Moses

was the real cause of their complaint though his having [haishshah האשה הכשית](#)-married an Ethiopian woman [haccushith](#) – That Woman, the Cushite, probably meaning Zipporah, who was an Arab born in the land of Midian – was the ostensible cause.” [END]

John Gill’s commentary has a lot to offer in first presenting the theories it disagrees with before stating what he believes: “not a queen of Ethiopia, as the Targum of Jonathan; nor Tharbis, a daughter of a king of Ethiopia, whom Josephus says he married, when he was sent upon an expedition against the Ethiopians, while he was in Pharaoh's court; nor the widow of an Ethiopian king whom he married after his death, when he fled from Pharaoh into Ethiopia, and was made a king there, as say some Jewish writers: for there is no reason to believe he was married before he went to Midian; nor was this some Ethiopian woman he had married since, and but lately, Zipporah being dead or divorced, as some have fancied; but it was Zipporah herself, as Aben Ezra, Ben Melech, and so the Jerusalem Targum, which represents her not as truly an Ethiopian, but so called, because she was like to one; indeed she was really one; not a native of Ethiopia, the country of the Abyssines, but she was a Cushite, a native of Arabia Chusea, in which

country Midian was, from whence she came; hence the tents, of Cushan, and the curtains of Midian, are spoken of together, Habakkuk 3:7. Now it was not on account of Moses's marriage with her that they spoke against him, for that was an affair transacted in Midian some years ago, which at first sight may seem to be the case; nor because he now had divorced her, as Jarchi, which perhaps would have given them no uneasiness; and for the same reason, not because he abstained from conversation with her, that he might give up himself to the service of God in his house, and perform it in a more holy and faithful manner, which is the common sentiment of the Jewish writers: but rather, as it is thought by others, because of a suspicion they had entertained, that she had interested herself in the affair of the choice of the seventy elders, and had prevailed upon Moses to put in such and such persons into the list she had a mind to serve; at least this seems to be the case, for the displeasure was against Moses himself; they were angry with him, because he transacted that affair without them, and chose whom he pleased, without consulting them; and therefore, though they cared not to ascribe it entirely to him, and his neglect of them, they imputed it to his wife, as

if she had ever persuaded him, or her brother through her means, to take such a step as he did.” [END]

Verse 3 – Moses was more humble than anyone else living at that time. What an amazing statement about him!

Verse 7 – Moses was firm in his obedience to God (faithful).

Verse 8 – Contrasting how God normally spoke to prophets through visions and dreams (verse 6), He tells Aaron & Miriam that He speaks face to face, speaking plainly and clearly (as opposed to parables or riddles). Because of this close relationship, God asks them “why they were not afraid to speak against Moses?”. This should cause all of us to stop and consider our own words against any of God’s chosen leaders. In Romans 13:1 – 2 (breaking into the verse), it states: “there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.” It is not uncommon in our world today to see people criticize and bring accusations against leaders often. Many times these criticisms and accusations are based on information that is often unreliable. Additionally, we see many who claim to be Christians criticizing and attacking leaders even of God’s Church. We must all be very careful in our words and criticisms. Aaron & Miriam would have been wise to keep their mouths closed and trust God to deal with their perceived injustice.

Verse 11 – Aaron quickly realizes how foolish and sinful he and his sister had been and is repentant.

Verse 12 – We covered back in Leviticus 13 & 14 the difficult life one had if one were a leper. Aaron equates leprosy with being “as one dead”. This makes sense as their life as they knew it would be over and they would be forced to live in isolation. John Gill’s commentary states: “As she was in a ceremonial sense, being to be shut up and excluded from the society of people, and as defiling by touching as a dead carcase; and, in a natural sense, her flesh, by the disease upon her, was become as dead flesh, putrid and rotten, and unless miraculously cured it would issue in her death:” [END]

Regarding the second half of that verse, it’s a disturbing image. Here is what John Gill’s commentary states: “like an abortive, or one stillborn, that has been dead some time in its mother's womb; and therefore when brought forth its flesh is almost wasted away, or at least half consumed: and in such a plight and condition was Miriam already, or quickly would be, through the force of her disease.” [END]

Verse 14 – While God could have quickly healed her, He instead thought it would be better for her (and perhaps others as an example) for her to at least have to deal with this punishment for seven days. I imagine she took that time to consider her sinful words and actions and probably learned and grew a lot.