

**Numbers 12:1 ¶ And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.**

**Numbers 12:2 And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it.**

Once again, pride and jealousy rear their ugly head in the persons of Miriam and Aaron. Apparently, they were motivated by their disdain for the Ethiopian woman Moses had married. (It seems racial prejudice was alive and well even then.) I assume this means that Zipporah had died since she was the daughter of a priest of Midian. The Midianites were descended from Abraham through his wife Keturah.

*Exodus 2:15–21 “...But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well. Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. And the shepherds came and drove them away: but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. And when they came to Reuel their father, he said, How is it that ye are come so soon to day? And they said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and also drew water enough for us, and watered the flock. And he said unto his daughters, And where is he? why is it that ye have left the man? call him, that he may eat bread. And Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter.”*

Some commentators posit that the woman being referenced is Zipporah using various reasons in connection with word meanings. I think if it had been Zipporah, she would have been named. Also, the Midianites and Cushites were descended from different family lines. Frankly, it doesn’t really have a bearing on the teaching of this chapter except to provide a pretext for trouble between the siblings.

Miriam and Aaron challenged that Moses was the only acceptable person through whom the LORD would speak to the people. They felt that they were just as capable to speak for the LORD as Moses. After all, wasn’t Aaron the high priest and Miriam a prophetess.

*Exodus 15:20 “And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron....”*

“And the LORD heard it.” – The LORD knows everything in our heart and every word we are going to speak before we utter it, and that should cause us to have a healthy fear concerning what we say. The problem is that we so often seem to forget that the LORD is always present with us.

*Psalms 139:4 “For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.”*

**Numbers 12:3 (Now the man Moses *was* very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)**

The LORD inspired Moses to record a parenthetical remark that helps explain his response to his sister and brother. My paraphrase—Moses was the meekest man on earth. In other words, he was very humble and did not think too much of himself in light of his position as God’s appointed leader of the people.

The Hebrew for the word “meek” also includes the idea of being depressed, so it could also have reference to the overwhelming burden he felt as the leader of this people to the point of asking God to kill him (as noted in the previous chapter). To have his sister and brother complain against him might have seemed like the last straw.

**Numbers 12:4 ¶ And the LORD spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out.**

**Numbers 12:5 And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth.**

The LORD spoke to Moses, Aaron and Miriam and told them to present themselves at the tabernacle. Such an immediately command should have put Miriam and Aaron on notice that the LORD had heard their accusation against Moses. Once there, the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud at the door of the tabernacle and called for Aaron and Miriam to step forward.

**Numbers 12:6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.**

**Numbers 12:7 My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house.**

**Numbers 12:8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?**

**Numbers 12:9 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed.**

The LORD basically rebuked the siblings by letting them know that He had a special relationship with Moses. He spoke to His prophets through visions and dreams that were not often easily understood. With Moses, however, He spoke clearly, mouth to mouth (implied—in my presence like I am speaking to you now). The LORD also acknowledged Moses as His faithful servant.

The LORD also pointed out that since they were well aware of how He spoke to Moses and how close was their relationship, that fact should have made them afraid to speak against Moses.

It is noted that the LORD was angry with the two siblings and departed.

**Numbers 12:10 ¶ And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.**

**Numbers 12:11 And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned.**

**Numbers 12:12 Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb.**

When the cloud of the LORD's presence lifted off the tabernacle, it was revealed that Miriam had become leprous, her skin white as snow (meaning she was covered with the disease). This would seem to indicate that Miriam was the instigator of their actions, though in no way lessens the fact that Aaron was complicit in their sin.

When Aaron saw his sister, he begged Moses not to hold their sin against them and admitted that they had acted foolishly and sinfully. He begged Moses to heal Miriam—implied, to intercede with the LORD for her.

**Numbers 12:13 And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee.**

**Numbers 12:14 And the LORD said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in *again*.**

**Numbers 12:15 And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in *again*.**

**Numbers 12:16 And afterward the people removed from Hazeroth, and pitched in the wilderness of Paran.**

Moses didn't hesitate to intercede for Miriam. He begged God to heal her ("now" is not in the Hebrew). The LORD agreed to heal her, but not right away. He reasoned that if her father had but spit in her face, she would have been ashamed for seven days. So, she was to be shut outside the camp for seven days after which she could once again be received in the camp.

Spitting on someone is a sign of great displeasure and disdain in the Middle East to this day. If a father had spit on his daughter, it would have made her unclean for seven days according to the JFB commentary.

Application: If we never experienced consequences for sin, we would not learn from them.

Point is also made that the people stayed put until Miriam was back in the camp. They then journeyed to Hazeroth (about 42 miles from Mt. Sinai) in the desert of Paran and once again made camp. The NIV Commentary notes that this should have been the staging area for their attack on the land of Canaan.