

Exegetical Notes, Numbers 12:1-16
“The Opposition Moves Closer”

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Numbers 12:1-16

Verse 1-2

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. ² “Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Hasn’t he also spoken through us?” And the LORD heard this.

- Miriam and Aaron are Moses’ sister and brother. They began to oppose Moses’ leadership of the Hebrews. They complained that Moses was treating them with contempt by not recognizing that they had equal standing with him before the Lord, for God had also spoken to the people through them.
- However, this charge was only a pretext. Their real objection to Moses was Mrs. Moses. She was foreign-born, and they did not like her.

Verse 3

³ *(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)*

- This remark is designed to show us that the accusation of record, that Moses was treating Aaron and Miriam with contempt, was utterly and completely untrue. Moses treated no one as they accused him of doing, not even those who openly opposed him.

Verse 4-9

⁴ *At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, “Come out to the tent of meeting, all three of you.” So the three of them went out. ⁵ Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When the two of them stepped forward, ⁶ he said, “Listen to my words:*

*“When there is a prophet among you,
I, the LORD, reveal myself to them in visions,*

I speak to them in dreams.
⁷ *But this is not true of my servant Moses;
he is faithful in all my house.*
⁸ *With him I speak face to face,
clearly and not in riddles;
he sees the form of the LORD.*
*Why then were you not afraid
to speak against my servant Moses?"*

⁹ *The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them.*

- So YHWH summoned Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to a meeting with him at the tent of meeting. There, he explained to Aaron and Miriam that he did regard Moses as uniquely different from all other prophets. He explained that he spoke to Moses face to face allowing Moses to look directly upon his form. God explained that this gave Moses special standing, even above their own.
- God told them that they should be afraid to speak against one upon whom God had bestowed special favor.
- God was angry with them when he left them.

Verse 10-12

¹⁰ *When the cloud lifted from above the tent, Miriam's skin was leprous — it became as white as snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had a defiling skin disease, ¹¹ and he said to Moses, "Please, my lord, I ask you not to hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. ¹² Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away."*

- When God left them, Miriam, the ring leader in the rebellion against Moses, was left with leprosy. Aaron pleaded with Moses to forgive them for what they had done in rebelling against him and so displeasing God.

Verse 13

¹³ *So Moses cried out to the LORD, "Please, God, heal her!"*

- Moses pleaded with God to heal his sister.

Verse 14

¹⁴ *The LORD replied to Moses, "If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back." ¹⁵ So Miriam was*

confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back.¹⁶ After that, the people left Hazeroth and encamped in the Desert of Paran.

- Miriam suffered with the disease for seven days. During that time she was isolated outside of the camp and forbidden from having any dealings with the people.
- But afterward, she was healed, forgiven and restored.

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