

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

10-20-21

Numbers 12

Miriam And Aaron Criticize Moses' Wife And Marriage - Verse 1

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

12:1 Moses didn't have a Jewish wife because he lived with the Egyptians the first 40 years of his life, and he was in the wilderness the next 40 years. This woman may not have been Zipporah, his first wife, who was a Midianite (see Exodus 2:21). A Cushite was an Ethiopian. However, it could be that Miriam was using the term "Cushite" loosely for "foreigner," which would easily work as a reference to Zipporah. Either way, there is no explanation given for why Miriam objected to this woman.

12:1 People often argue over minor disagreements, leaving the real issue untouched. Such was the case when Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses. They represented the priests and the prophets, the two most powerful groups next to Moses. The real issue was their growing jealousy of Moses' position and influence. Since they could not find fault with the way Moses was leading the people, they chose to criticize his wife. Rather than face the problem squarely by dealing with their envy and pride, they chose to create a diversion from the real issue. When you are in a disagreement, stop and ask yourself if you are arguing over the real issue or if you have introduced a smoke screen by attacking someone's character. If you are unjustly criticized, remember that your critics may be afraid to face the real problem. Don't take this type of criticism personally. Ask God to help you identify the real issue and deal with it.

A Challenge To Moses' Spiritual Authority - Verse 2

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

12:2 Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? This attack attempted to put Moses down, making him seem proud. After all, it should matter nothing to Aaron and Miriam if indeed the LORD had spoken only through Moses. Their real charge was that Moses "goes about acting as if he is the only one the LORD speaks through," accusing Moses of pride.

Did the LORD indeed only speak through Moses? No and yes. Of course, the LORD had spoken through many in the Book of Exodus already: The LORD spoke the people through Aaron in Exodus 4:30; He spoke to Aaron in Exodus 12:1; Miriam herself spoke words inspired by God in Exodus 15:21. But in the sense of there being one leader for Israel, there was only one. Moses, under God's hand, had the authority and the accountability to lead the people.

12:2 Has He not spoken through us also? This question was meant to lift Miriam and Aaron up. "After all, God speaks to us also. Shouldn't we get some of the credit around here?" Of course,

God had spoken to Miriam and Aaron in the past - but He had not given them the authority to lead the nation.

Can God give one man the authority to lead His people? Of course He can. The Old and New Testaments are filled with this kind of leadership (Moses, Joshua, David, Daniel, James, Peter, Paul, Timothy, Titus; and of course Jesus, whose leadership style we are commanded to imitate).

And the LORD heard it: Of course God heard it. God always does, and He hears according to truth, not according to mere appearance. Miriam and Aaron - as is often the case - were accusing Moses of the very same sin motivating them to make the accusation (pride).

The Humble Heart Of Moses - Verse 3

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

12:3 Now the man Moses was very humble: Moses had no problem with pride. Quite the contrary - his accusers were the ones with a pride problem. If this genuinely humble man Moses was accused of pride and a dictatorial manner, it should show us that the accusation can be made and is made against others who do not deserve it. Just because a man is accused of pride or arrogance doesn't mean he is guilty of it.

It is important to see that Moses didn't start out as the most humble man on earth; he grew up proud and confident in his abilities. It was only time, desert time, lowly time, that made him a humble - and greatly usable - man.

God Answers The Accusation Of Miriam And Aaron Against Moses - Verses 4-5

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.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.

12:4-5 Suddenly: There was no long delay. Many of God's judgments are long in coming, at least from a human perspective - but on occasion, He does bring His justice suddenly.

Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting! God called - seemingly, in an audible voice - for all three to come before the tabernacle of meeting. Perhaps Miriam and Aaron thought that God would use this situation to correct Moses, whom they thought was proud and dictatorial. Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud: God took a personal, powerful interest in this important matter. He wanted to make His will plainly known.

God's Vindication Of Moses - Verses 6-9

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. ⁷ My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. 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? ⁹ And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed.

12:6 I speak with him face to face: The basis of the complaint of Miriam and Aaron was essentially, "What's so special about Moses?" Here, God explained exactly what was so special about him. Most prophets receive revelation through a dream or in a vision; God spoke with Moses face to face.

12:7 My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings: Moses enjoyed remarkable communion with God, and it is worth considering why.

i. Because God needed a man this intimate with Him, to be a vessel of revelation and a proper leader for the nation through this remarkable time of the Exodus; this communion was a gift of the sovereign God to Moses.

ii. Because Moses was a humble man; only the humble - those who are genuinely others centered - can be responsible with such communion with God.

iii. Because Moses, according to God, is faithful in all My house: His walk of righteousness and purity, demonstrated over forty years in obscure service of God in the smallest things, revealed the faithful heart God saw in Moses.

12:9 Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses? As much as Miriam and Aaron did not want to recognize it, Moses did have a unique calling and equipping before the LORD. They did not speak against Moses as the President of Israel as much as they spoke against Moses the Servant of God.

It was not that Moses was beyond criticism. Moses was not to be simply obeyed and praised, and never confronted or asked the tough questions. In fact, another relative of Moses, his father-in-law Jethro, did confront Moses and ask him the tough questions and he was greatly used of God in doing so (Exodus 18:12-24).

12:9 So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed: After making His anger evident, the remarkable presence of God departed. This left an extremely uncomfortable pause for Miriam and Aaron.

God's Punishment For Miriam - Verse 10

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.

12:10 Suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow: Leprosy was a disease of bodily decay and corruption; it was considered to be a "walking death" - and Miriam had a seriously advanced case of leprosy instantly. At this moment, God caused her body to reflect her heart.

Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper: It seems that Miriam did not immediately know this; the sense seems to be that Aaron noticed it first as he turned and looked.

Aaron's Contrition - Verses 11-12

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

12:11 Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned: Aaron seems a man easily swayed; swayed by a crowd wanting an idol, swayed by his sister (who seemed to be instigator, because she is named first and was first struck with leprosy), and now swayed quickly back to a humble submission before Moses.

12:12 Aaron asked that the sin he and Miriam had committed not be held against them. It is easy to look back at our mistakes and recognize their foolishness. It is much harder to recognize foolish plans while we are carrying them out because somehow then they seem appropriate. To get rid of foolish ideas before they turn into foolish actions requires eliminating our wrong thoughts and motives. Failing to do this caused Miriam and Aaron much grief.

Moses Prays For Miriam - Verse 13

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

12:12 So Moses cried out to the LORD: This was the first word spoken by Moses in this chapter. He had not spoken the entire time he was accused, leaving it up to God to answer his critics. When a leader perceives accusations are petty, false, or self-motivated, the right thing to do is to ignore them, leave them up to God, and keep busy with what the LORD has called the leader to do - even as Jesus was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. (Isaiah 53:7). Please heal her, O God, I pray! When Moses spoke, it was in prayer for his accusers. Moses certainly was a man faithful in the LORD's house.

The Restoration Of Miriam - Verse 14

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. ¹⁵ And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again. ¹⁶ And afterward the people removed from Hazeroth, and pitched in the wilderness of Paran.

12:14 Spitting in someone's face was considered the ultimate insult and a sign of shame imposed on wrongdoers. The religious leaders spat in Jesus' face to insult him (Matthew 26:67). God punished Miriam for her smug attitude toward not only Moses' authority, but also God's. He struck her with leprosy, then ordered her out of the camp for a week. This punishment was actually quite lenient. A week was the length of time she would have been excluded if her father had spit in her face. How much more she deserved for wronging God! Once again, God was merciful while retaining an effective discipline.