

Challenges to Moses' Leadership (Chapter 12)

Miriam and Aaron Rise Against Moses (12:1-3)

In chapter eleven, we read about the general complaints Israel lodged against Moses and against God. Here in this chapter, a challenge to Moses' very leadership arises. Sadly, it comes from within Moses' own family! His sister Miriam and his brother Aaron bring two accusations against him, apparently in hopes of gaining some advantage for themselves. Miriam appears to be the instigator of these complaints against Moses

First They talked against him because he had married a "Cushite" wife. Zipporah, who was married to Moses back in Ex 2:21 was from the land of Midian, so she was not a full-blooded Israelite. This is something of a racial attack, intended perhaps to muddy Moses' reputation.

Second The second attack was even more severe. Miriam and Aaron said, "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" This was a direct assault on Moses' leadership. God had directed Moses to lead the Israelites and had designated Moses as his official "spokesman." Here now his brother and sister were suggested that they needed to have a piece of the action also. After all, Aaron was a high priest and Miriam had spoken by the Spirit when she led Israel in song after the incident at the Red Sea.

Verse three tells us that Moses, in humility, did not respond to their attacks. Instead, he waited for the LORD to answer.

! What do you think Aaron and Miriam hoped to gain by attacking Moses?

! What part do you think jealousy played in their words to Moses?

! Miriam and Aaron complained against Moses, but how could it be said that they were really complaining against God?

! Observe that since the Israelites have left Sinai, they have been in spiritual decline.

God Responds (12:4-9)

It didn't take God long to weigh in with an opinion on this little confrontation. Moses did not even have to respond to these challenges to his authority. The Lord responded for him. He summoned Moses, Miriam, and Aaron to the Tent of Meeting. Then He called Miriam and Aaron forward and told them in no uncertain terms that *Moses* was the one whom He had chosen to lead Israel. Moses' authority was established by God for:

- A) He was faithful to the LORD (v7)
- B) God spoke with him face to face (v8)
- C) He had seen the form of the LORD (v8)

The case was closed, and the LORD “walked” away.

! Read Luke 10:16. Why is it dangerous to reject a servant of the LORD?

Judgment and Mercy (12:10-16)

Now Miriam and Aaron were to feel the consequences of their sins. When God lifted the cloud from the Tent, Miriam was full of leprosy.

Immediately Aaron confessed their sin and appealed to Moses for help. “Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed.” The LORD replied that if her father had disgraced her, she would have had to live outside the camp for seven days. Since her heavenly Father had disgraced her on account of her sin, she would also have to live outside the camp for seven days. This she did, and then she was received back among the people.

! God brought judgment on Miriam, but He also showed mercy. Read Ps 32:5 and 1 Jn 1:9 to see how this same God responds to us when we confess our sins.

! How was God’s mercy to Miriam evident in v15b?

! How is the Heavenly Father able to show mercy on us even though we are terrible sinners?