

Message #13**Numbers 12:1-16**

When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He said this: “And I say to you that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you shall be justified and by your words you shall be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37). I don’t think most people have a clue as to the seriousness of what they say. Most do not realize that what one says with his or her mouth will be used as a basis for judgment when one gets before God.

Last time, we saw that the people were in a place called Hazeroth and they were grumbling. They were sick of eating manna and they wanted meat so God sent them quail, but He also sent a plague. Now you would think that the people would learn their lesson. You would certainly think that the leaders would learn their lesson. But they didn’t.

Miriam and Aaron decided they would grumble and complain about Moses and his wife and God said they will pay a severe personal price for that.

THERE ARE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES WHEN GOD’S PEOPLE ARROGANTLY GRUMBLE AND COMPLAIN ABOUT THE LEADER AND HIS WIFE THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN.

The kingpin leader of this verbal grumbling was Miriam. She is the one who shot off her mouth and she is the one who ultimately receives the judgment of God. We all need this text, but ladies, watch what you say because God is listening. As we look down through these verses there are five parts to them:

PART #1 – Miriam and Aaron decided to speak against Moses. 12:1-2

No one knows for sure what prompted this, but for some reason, they decided to pop off their mouths negatively against a very powerful man of God, who happened to be their brother. Moses had been mightily used by God and they apparently were jealous. What is so sad is that these are family members of Moses who are the first to actually rebel against Moses.

Shortly after Israel arrived at Hazeroth, and after the Tabernacle had been set up, Moses became the target of severe criticism. Miriam, the sister of Moses, and Aaron, the brother of Moses, started thinking more highly of themselves than they ought. Aaron already held the position of high priest and Miriam was called a prophetess (Ex. 15:20).

They decided they were just as important as Moses and they had the right to criticize him. Now these two should have thought this through. God had not done with them what He had done with Moses. He had led Moses to retrieve an entire nation Israel. He had done special miraculous things through Moses, not with them. He had revealed His Word to Moses in ways He never revealed it to them. They would have been wise to keep their mouths shut. But pride got the best of them and it was about to cost them.

This kind of thing happens in the church. There are people who think more highly of themselves than they ought and they think they are just as equally qualified and can do just as good a job. Truth is they aren't and they can't. These people don't have the same calling.

Miriam and Aaron was not Moses. God had not used them even close to the way He had used Moses. In fact, if it weren't for Moses, they would not even have a Tabernacle or the Word of God. But they apparently forgot about that and they arrogantly decided to criticize Moses and even elevate themselves in the process.

They didn't like Moses' wife. Now Moses' first wife was named Zipporah (Ex. 18:2). We don't know what happened to her. It is possible she had died. It is also possible she was alive and left Moses and went back with her father.

We don't know much about what happened, but what we do learn in **verse 1** is that Moses had married a Cushite woman. Now the Lord had said that no Israelite was to marry a woman from Canaan, who worshipped a foreign god (Ex. 34:14-16). He did not say it was wrong to marry a woman from a different culture.

We don't know much about the identity of this Cushite woman and we don't know much about the country from which she came. Some have suggested that it was a woman from Africa.

According to Isaiah 18:1, Cush seems to have been somewhere near the Nile river. In Genesis, Cush was in the line of Ham (Gen. 10:1, 6), one of Noah's sons, and the Hamites lived somewhere near Ethiopia. It is possible that they did not like her because of racial discrimination.

It is possible that they did not like her color; they did not like her background; they did not like her face or her figure or her ethnic background. She wasn't up to their liking. For whatever reason they just did not like Moses' wife and they started speaking their minds.

According to **verse 2**, they said we are just as important as Moses is. Miriam was Moses' older sister so she thought she had the right to shoot off her mouth against her brother. In fact, both Aaron and Miriam assumed they had the right to say what they wanted because God has spoken through them just like He did through Moses, which is absolutely not true.

I told you this story, but it is worth repeating. In our first church a guy from CAM missions came to see me wanting support. I brought up the fact that it was great he was part of a mission founded by C. I. Scofield. He arrogantly said, we have come a long way since Scofield, in fact, if he were alive today, we wouldn't even let him join this mission. My face went red and I threw him out. I said who do you think you are? I guarantee you that 50 years after you are dead your name won't be remembered, but Dr. Scofield will still be remembered 50 years from now. What arrogance.

It is a dangerous thing to open your mouth and start speaking against a man who has been greatly used by God. God does not view that lightly and those who do it will pay a severe price.

PART #2 – God responds to Miriam and Moses. **12:2b-9**

Notice the last part of **verse 2**, the LORD heard their big arrogant mouths. God says in **verse 3** that Moses was the most humble man on the earth. Moses never saw himself as anything great. He was not given to position and rank and when they were speaking against him, he apparently just quietly went about his business. He was a “meek” man.

Well God says I will not let them get away with that. According to **verse 4**, God told Moses to get Aaron and Miriam and bring them to the Tent of Meeting. Now Miriam and Aaron had their ministries assigned by God and I am certain that when Moses called them to the tent of meeting, they thought this was another great team episode.

Verse 5 says that when they got there, the LORD came down in a pillar of a cloud and He stood at the doorway to the Tent and asked Aaron and Miriam to step forward. When they stepped forward, God addressed them:

Message #1 - When I speak through a prophet, I do so through a vision or dream. **12:6**

Probably at this point, Miriam and Aaron are saying everyone knows that.

Message #2 - When I speak to Moses, I speak mouth to mouth and face to face. **12:7-8a**

Moses is faithful in everything pertaining to Me and My house. I literally speak to him and he sees My form. The idea of God speaking with Moses face to face means He literally spoke to Moses verbally and permitted Moses to actually see His visible presence. God says I have actually revealed My glory to him (Ex. 19:16-19; 24:17-18; **34:5-11**).

In other words, I have actual Personal conversations with Moses that I don't even have with other prophets. This is how special Moses is to Me, God is saying. He is a faithful man and I openly speak to him in ways I speak with no one else.

Message #3 - Why are you not afraid to speak out against My servant, Moses? **12:8b**

How dare you open your mouth against My most faithful and humble man on the face of this earth?

God says this was My chosen leader. God says I gave him his position and power and authority and who in the world are you to challenge this?

According to **verse 9**, God's anger burned against Aaron and Miriam and He departed.

PART #3 - God punishes Miriam. 12:10-12

As soon as the presence of God departed from the Tabernacle, Miriam was hit with a leprosy that made her as white as the snow. She had probably been complaining about the darkness of the Cushite woman Moses married, and now she is white like snow, filled with leprosy. Now this is not the typical clinical case of leprosy. This is a judgment of God that hit Miriam with a leprosy that made her as white as snow.

About 200 cases a year of leprosy occur in the United States. Leprosy does not typically make one white as snow. It eats away various parts of the body. So this was a very unusual judgment of God.

Now according to **verse 10**, when Aaron turned and saw his sister Miriam covered with leprosy, he was shocked.

According to **verse 11**, he immediately said to Moses we have sinned. We have acted foolishly in our sin; please, Moses, forgive us and help us. He pleaded that she would not be like one dead (**v. 12**). People with leprosy would linger on with it and it would eat more and more flesh away and then they would eventually die. **He immediately acknowledged Moses' superiority and asked Moses to intercede.**

Forgiveness is never unconditional. They wronged Moses and they are asking him to forgive them.

PART #4 - Moses intercedes on behalf of Miriam. 12:13

Moses immediately cried out to the LORD to lift the judgment and heal his sister.

PART #5 - God responds to Moses' request. 12:14

God was not willing to immediately deliver her. She needed to learn a lesson so she could come to terms with the serious nature of her sin. She had rebelled against Moses, who was His choice, and even though they had spoken in private, God would make her admit this publicly.

God's response was basically Miriam is a spoiled brat. God said had her father ever spit in her face when she had her verbal temper tantrums, she would not need to be put to this shame.

There is no specific text that demands that a father spit in his daughter's face when she is out of line, but Deuteronomy 25:9 says it was a sign of contempt and Isaiah 50:6 connects it to a great insult and shame.

God healed her, but he shut her outside the camp for seven days and the people did not move for seven days. This taught all Israel a lesson; do not speak against God's leader, because there are serious consequences if you do. If God would do that to Moses' own sister, what would He do to others?

This delay was a delay that could make people think. If we want the blessings of God, we better not be running our mouths.

According to **verses 15-16**, after the seven days of purification were over and Miriam was back in the camp, the people moved from Hazeroth to the wilderness of Paran.

Moses would later tell Israel not to forget about this episode with Miriam (Deut. 24:9) when they got into the Promised Land.

In other words, when things are good, do not start complaining about the leader or leaders who helped make things good.