

HIGHLIGHTS FROM NUMBERS  
"Rebellion in the Wilderness"  
 Numbers 12:1-16

UPDATE

1. Chapter 11 records two complaints: a. The people of Israel over an anonymous problem and food. b. Moses over his responsibility for the people.

2. Here's another problem. This time it is a matter of jealousy (cf. Micah 6:4). Study the teachings of this episode.

1. ABOUT THE COMPLAINT vv. 1-2

Miriam (mentioned first!) and Aaron spoke against Moses. They were siblings (Ex. 4:14; 15:20). Two complaints:

a. Moses' marriage v. 1

There is considerable conjecture about the "Ethiopian" (Cushite) woman. It is very likely that she is the same as Zipporah (Ex. 2:16-25). The only marriage known for Moses is to Zipporah. Moreover, by the system of gematria (finding hidden meaning through numerical equivalents of Hebrew letters) "Cushite" has up to 736 as does "beautiful of appearance." This may be the meaning here. Hence the siblings were jealous of their beautiful sister-in-law.

b. Moses position v. 2

Jealousy and wounded pride are related. Miriam and Aaron wanted equal recognition with Moses as spokespersons for the Lord. This may have been occasioned by the 70 (11:24, 25). Whatever the reason, Moses' position was questioned--a place God had given him.

2. ABOUT GOD'S CHOICE vv. 3-8

a. Declared vv. 4, 5, 8

God responds to Miriam and Aaron (not Moses!) suddenly with terror (Hebrew). He comes down in the cloud, at the tabernacle door, stands there (!) and speaks. Before Him are Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. What an awesome experience. What "gets" God is the lack of fear to speak against "My servant" (v. 8). Hence, complaint against Moses was in fact against God! This is certainly supported by "and the Lord heard it" (v.2)

2. Detailed vv. 3, 6, 7, 8

Moses is described in detail as being:

1) A meek man v. 3. This has often been understood to mean weak, but not so. The Hebrew word is variously translated as poor (Deut. 15:11), powerless (Amos 2:7), oppressed by the powerful (Psa. 10:17),

one who relies on God (Psa. 37:11). The word "humble" may fit well. The verse states Moses was unique with this characteristic in all the world!

2) A servant of God vv. 7, 8. Twice God refers to Moses by this term. The term is used regularly in the O.T. of heroes of faith (e.g. David).

3) A faithful man in God's house v. 7  
Viewing all associated with God's house, Moses is evaluated as "faithful" i.e. trustworthy.

4) A receiver of direct revelation vv. 6, 7  
Prophets receive messages from God by dreams and visions (v. 6). These are means by which truth is conveyed. Moses, however, received truth intimately--mouth to mouth (v. 8).

5) A man close to God v. 8.  
The word "similitude" is a reference to God's "form," not his essential being (cf. Ex. 33:18-23; Job 4:16).

### 3. ABOUT GOD'S JUDGMENT vv. 9-10

a. His personal departure vv. 9, 10  
God's anger (hot nose) is seen. He removed Himself from the tent door. This was evidenced by the departure of the cloud (vv. 9, 10a).

b. Miriam's personal affliction v. 10  
Modern leprosy (Hansen's disease) is normally not considered that described in the Bible. It may refer to a patchy, scaly skin complaint. The peeling scales may look like snow. This was God's judgment for sacrilegious talk (cf. Ki 5:27; 2 Ch 26:19). The Bible is silent as to why Aaron was not afflicted.

### 4. ABOUT GOD'S GRACE vv. 11-15

a. Aaron's confession and plea vv. 11, 12  
Aaron confessed sin. He admitted he and Miriam had done foolishly. He appealed to Moses (whom he charged earlier!) not to treat Miriam like a stillborn baby whose flesh is half consumed.

b. Moses' prayer v. 13  
Moses becomes the intercessor. No contempt is shown for either Miriam or Aaron. He asked for immediate healing.

c. God's gracious response vv. 14, 15  
Healing took place. Banishment outside the camp was necessary (cf. Deut. 25:9). Miriam's great stature in Israel is seen in the nation's inability to move during her banishment (v. 15).

UPSHOT OF EVENTS Consider: 1. Complaints may have "presenting problems" which may not be the real issue. 2. Those who attack God's servants risk His wrath. 3. It is safe to leave our defense in the Lord's hands when we are innocent of false charges. Much more!