Moses’ Intercession for Miriam

One of the great intercessory prayer of Moses was his intercession for his sister Miriam where he prayed that the Lord would heal her of the leprosy, which the Lord disciplined her with because of her rebellion (Nm. 12).

Num 12:1, “Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman).”

Miriam was the sister of Aaron and Moses who were of course brothers. Miriam was a “prophetess” according to Exodus 15:20 and her song of victory after Israel crossed the Red Sea is one of the oldest pieces of literature written in Hebrew (Ex. 15:20f.).

Aaron was the older brother of Moses and high priest in Israel. The fact that Miriam’s name is mentioned first in the passage indicates that she was the one who instigated this rebellion, which Aaron fell in line with. It appears that Aaron was a weak sister with no moral courage since he gave in to Israel’s rebellion at the foot of Mount Horeb when he made the golden calf for Israel to worship.

Moses had divorced his first wife Zipporah and remarried a Cushite woman (probably Ethiopian) of Hamitic descent (Gen. 10:6). It appears that Moses divorced Zipporah because she was negative and disobedient to the Word of God as reflected in her complaining to Moses about having to circumcise their sons.

Ex 4:25-26, “Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, ‘You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.’ So He let him alone. At that time she said, ‘You are a bridegroom of blood' -- because of the circumcision.”

Every parent in Israel was commanded by the Lord to have their boys circumcised on the eighth day after their birth, which Moses and Zipporah failed to do.

Lev 12:2-3, “When a woman gives birth and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.”

This failure to circumcise his boys almost cost Moses his life according to Exodus 4:22-24. Zipporah’s negative attitude towards the Lord’s commands evidently led to Moses divorcing her. According to Exodus 34:11, 16, Israelites were not prohibited from marrying Cushites.

Moses’ first wife, Zipporah remarried as well to Moses’ father in law whose name was Jethro according to Exodus 18:2.

Ex 18:2, “Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Moses' wife Zipporah, after he had sent her away.”

The phrase “after he sent her away” was an expression to denote divorce.

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Miriam is using Moses’ remarriage as a pretext to protest and question his authority over the nation of Israel.

Num. 12:2, “and they said, ‘Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?’ And the LORD heard it.”  

Miriam and Aaron have rejected Moses’ authority, which was delegated by the Lord to him, therefore, Miriam and Aaron are in reality rejected the authority of the Lord since the Lord placed Moses in his position as leader of Israel.

The Lord taught this principle to the prophet Samuel.

1 Sam 8:7, “The LORD said to Samuel, ‘Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.’”

Authority is the power or right to enforce obedience and is the right to control, command or determine.

God has instituted authority in order to: (1) Protect free will (volition) (2) Protect the human race from self-destruction (3) Give order to life (4) Maintain peace (5) Allow the Gospel to spread and influence people. (6) To support the believer’s witness by their authority orientation in the devil’s world.


Here in the church age, believers are to obey and submit to the authority of the pastor-teacher who is the delegated authority in the local church.

Heb 13:17, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

Miriam does not have respect for Moses’ position as the leader of Israel and is confusing her relationship with Moses in the natural realm with her relationship with him in the spiritual realm. Moses is her younger brother in the natural realm but in the spiritual realm she is under his authority, which was delegated to him by the Lord.

She is “familiar” with Moses because he is her younger brother and unfortunately, at times, familiarity breeds contempt. Principle: Do not become familiar with your leaders.

1 Thess 5:12-13, “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.”
Num. 12:2, “and they said, ‘Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?’ And the LORD heard it.”

Miriam is revealing her jealousy towards Moses. Jealousy is a mental attitude sin directed toward another, which is resentful, intolerant and suspicious of another’s success, possessions or relationships and is vigilant in maintaining or guarding something. Jealousy originates with Satan and demonic.

James 3:14-16, “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”

Jealousy originated in eternity past with Satan since he jealously desired the worship of the angels (Isa. 14:12-14). Jealousy is one of the manifestations of the old sin nature.

Gal 5:19-21, “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who make it a habit to practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Jealousy is concerned about self-advancement and personal gain. Miriam is concerned here about her own self-advancement and personal gain. Jealousy leads to inordinate ambition and competition. Miriam is involved in inordinate ambition and competition with Moses.

Num. 12:3, “(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)”

Num. 12:4, “Suddenly the LORD said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, ‘You three come out to the tent of meeting.’ So the three of them came out.”

Num. 12:5, “Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward.”

Num. 12:6, “He said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream.’”

Num. 12:7, “Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household.”

Num. 12:8, “With him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?”

Num. 12:9, “So the anger of the LORD burned against them and He departed.”
Num. 12:10, “But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was leprous.”

Leprosy is a chronic, infectious disease characterized by sores, scabs, and white shining spots beneath the skin. Modern medicine has all but eliminated the disease after learning proper methods of treatment. Aaron was not struck with leprosy because he was the high priest and if afflicted with this disease he would not be able to serve in that important capacity.

Num. 12:11, “Then Aaron said to Moses, ‘Oh, my lord, I beg you, do not account this sin to us, in which we have acted foolishly and in which we have sinned.”

Num. 12:12, “Oh, do not let her be like one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes from his mother's womb!”

Num. 12:13, “Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, ‘O God, heal her, I pray!’”

Up to this point, if you notice in the passage, that Moses had said absolutely nothing in his defense when Miriam and Aaron questioned his authority but rather in complete and total submission, he let God be his defense.

Ps 7:8-11, “The LORD judges the peoples; Vindicate me, O LORD, according to my righteousness and my integrity that is in me. O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous; For the righteous God tries the hearts and minds. My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart. God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day.”

Here in Numbers 12:13 as we saw in Numbers 11:2, Moses is acting as a mediator. In Numbers 12:13, Moses is acting as a “mediator” between the Lord and Miriam for the purposing of reconciling her to the Lord.

The biblical concept of mediation is to bring sinful man to reconciliation with a holy God. "Mediation" can be defined as the act of intervening between parties at odds with one another for the purpose of reconciling them.

The Lord is angry with Miriam’s attack upon Moses whom the Lord has delegated authority to, therefore, Moses will mediate with intercessory prayer for her in an attempt to reconcile her to the Lord.

Without any bitterness towards Miriam or Aaron, Moses interceded for his sister as he had interceded for the entire nation when Aaron made the golden calf. God forgave her and Aaron, but not without public humiliation and severe discipline, which their rebellion deserved.

Moses is demonstrating his humility here by letting the Lord deal with Miriam and not attempting to defend himself. His humility is also demonstrated in that he doesn’t take this attack upon his authority, personal and is objective towards
Miriam and this objectivity is manifested in that he doesn’t hesitate to pray for Miriam when Aaron begs him to.

Num. 12:14, “But the LORD said to Moses, ‘If her father had but spit in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut up for seven days outside the camp, and afterward she may be received again.’”

Num. 12:15, “So Miriam was shut up outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until Miriam was received again.”

Miriam’s discipline was public because her rebellion against the Moses’ authority was public.

Miriam’s discipline had to be public because rebellion against God’s delegated authority is a serious sin and was the sin of Satan in eternity past (Isa. 14:12-14).

1 Sam 15:23, “For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.”

This quarantine of Miriam was according to the Law in Leviticus 13-14.

Num. 12:16, “Afterward, however, the people moved out from Hazeroth and camped in the wilderness of Paran.”