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The Rebellion of Miryam and Aaron

12: 1-16

The rebellion of Miryam and Aaron DIG: Where did Aaron and Miryam go wrong? What was their real objection? Why was Miryam disciplined and not Aaron? What is a prophet? What distinguished Moshe from all other prophets? What is humility? What does it mean when it says that Moshe was more than any man who was on the face of the earth?

REFLECT: Is there anything in Chapters 11 and 12 about complaining, discouragement or meekness that is relevant to your life? How so? How does God speak to you? How can the object lesson here help you to be more like Moses and less like Miryam and Aaron? Ask ADONAI to give you greater acceptance for the ministry He has given you.

The rebellion spread to the inner circle.



Moshe's Ethiopian wife (12:1-2): Miryam and Aaron, Moses' began criticizing (Hebrew: *watedabber*, meaning to *speak against*) **Moshe (12:1a)**. The chapter begins with the feminine singular form of the verb *watedabber*, indicating that **Miryam** was the instigator of the rebellion. **Aaron** was **the high priest** of **Isra'el**, **brother** of **Moses**. **He** was simply following **his sister's** lead out of a weak will, which tended to be **Aaron's** character (see the commentary on **Exodus**, to see link click [Gq](#) - The Golden Calf

Incident). We have heard less of **Miryam**, but **she** appeared earlier in key roles in **the Exodus**. **She** was **the sister** of **Moshe** and named as a prophetess in **Exodus 15:20-23**. **Miryam** led the women of **Isra'el** in song, dance, and praise of **God** after the successful flight out of Egypt and the defeat of Pharaoh and his army (see **Exodus Cj - Songs of the Sea**). Tradition also associates **Miryam** with the unnamed older **sister** of **Moshe** who kept a lookout as the infant **Moses** floated down the river in a basket (see **Exodus Ak - A Man of the House of Levi Married a Levite Woman**). Finally, **Micah 6:4** lists all the gracious gifts which **YHVH** gave **Isra'el** during its journey through the desert, including **Isra'el's** three leaders: **I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miryam**. Thus, **Miryam** was a leader of the people, a prophetess, a singer of praise of **God**, a courageous savior of baby **Moshe**, and a **sister** to both **Aaron** and **Moses**.²¹⁰

On account of the Cushite woman he had married, for he had in fact married a Cushite woman (12:1b). **Moshe** had evidently divorced **Zipporah** (see **Exodus Az - Surely You are a Bridegroom of Blood to Me**) or **she** has died. **Moses'** current marriage could not be criticized unless it were a case of bigamy (for which there is no evidence) for **the Cushites** were not among those whom **Israelites** might not marry (**Exodus 34:11 and 16**). **The Cushites** were not necessarily a different color since **they** existed in early times in Arabia as well as **Cush** proper (what is today southern Egypt, Sudan, and northern Ethiopia). Possibly **Miryam**, who apparently led this part of the challenge, saw in **Moshe's** new wife a threat to **her** own standing as the major female figure in **Isra'el's leadership**.²¹¹

The mention of **the Cushite woman**, however, was just an excuse. The real reason is clear from **Miryam** and **Aaron's** question. **She** asked: **Is it true that ADONAI has spoken only with Moshe? Hasn't he spoken with us too (12:2a)?** Envy, perhaps simmering for a long time, now came to the surface. It is not unlike that in **Exodus 2:23-25**, where four verbs are used of **YHVH's** understanding to **His** purposes: **He hears, He sees, He remembers, and He knows**.

The gravity of **Miryam** and **Aaron's** objection can be seen in the terse, ominous, conclusion to the verse. **And ADONAI heard them (12:2b)**. **The writer** is well aware that **Ha'Shem "hears"** everything. This special notice means that **the LORD heard** with an intention of acting, of intervening on behalf of **His servant**.

The humility of Moshe (12:3): And **the writer himself** made the remarkable statement that such envy was totally uncalled for since **he** was not arrogant but **was, in fact, very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth**. The narrator's parenthetical comment instantly undercuts **Miryam** and **Aaron's** complaint, and seeks to

persuade the reader to stand with **Moses** in **his** defense against **his** siblings.²¹²

There is a teaching in Judaism that contrasts **humility** against **pride** in a person's relationship to **God**. A prideful person is called "yeish," that is a "somebody." He is like a container filled with the essence of himself. There is no room for **God** within him. Opposed to that, there is a "bitul," or a person of such total **humility** that he is like a container with nothing in it. Since the container is empty, it can be filled with **God**. A person of self-abnegation is transparent, allowing the essence of **God** to fill him and flow through him. A person who is prideful is opaque. A person of total **humility** is one through whom a full expression of godliness could be expressed. Such is our **Righteous Messiah** who **humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the Name which is above every name (Philippians 2:8-9).**²¹³

The defense of Moshe by ADONAI (12:4-9): **God** also immediately appears in defense of **Moses**. Suddenly, **ADONAI** told **Moshe**, **Aaron** and **Miryam**, "Come out, you three, to the Tabernacle." The three of them went out and the **Sh'khinah** glory of **ADONAI** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ju - The Glory of the LORD Rises Upon You**) came down and stood at the entrance to the Tabernacle. He summoned **Aaron** and **Miryam**, and they both went forward (12:1-5).

Next is an example of introversion in poetry (see **Ac - Numbers from a Messianic Jewish Perspective: Chiasm and introversion**). The first half describes how **God** communicates with other **prophets (ABC)**, the second half, describes **His** unique communication with **Moshe (CBA)**. Verses **6** and **8** each contain sixteen syllables and balance each other perfectly. **The pivot sets Moses apart and declares that YHVH confides in Moshe alone.**²¹⁴

Introduction: Then **ADONAI** said: **Listen to what I say:**

A. When there is a prophet among you (12:6a). A **prophet** in the biblical context is not someone who can read minds. This is an occult practice called divination, also forbidden by Torah. A **prophet** is someone who can hear **ADONAI speaking** and is commissioned by **God** to **speak** on **His** behalf. The prophetic formula we always find in Scripture is: **ADONAI spoke saying, "Speak to so-and-so and say . . ."** During the Dispensation of Torah (see **Exodus Da - The Dispensation of Torah**) **they** had the singular role of bringing **God's Word** - instruction and warnings directly to **His people**. Thus, **they** were expected to **speak** the perfect, inspired **Word of God**; if not, **they** were condemned as a false prophet (**Jeremiah 14:14-16**) and stoned to **death (Deut 18:20)**.

There were **prophets** in the Dispensation of Grace (see the commentary on **Hebrews Bp - The Dispensation of Grace**) as a ministry to the Church. **Agabus (Acts 11:27-28, 21:10-11); Ana the prophetess (Luke 2:36-38); Barnabas, Simon called Niger and Lucius the Cyrene (Acts 13:17); Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32); the four daughters of Philip who prophesied (Acts 21:9); and the apostle John who prophesied in the book of Revelation. Prophets foretold either near historical events or far eschatological events.** Once the last book in the Bible was written, the canon of Scripture was closed and there was no need for any further revelation. **The Ruach Ha’Kodesh** has equipped believers with everything we need to live a victorious life, and thus **prophecy** has passed away. There is no continuous revelation.

B. I, ADONAI, make Myself known to him in a vision (12:6b). There are many examples of **visions** in the TaNaKh (**Exodus 15:1; Second Samuel 7:17; Isaiah 1:1; Jeremiah 24:1; Ezeke’el 1:1 and 8:3-4; Obadiah 1:1; Nahum 1:1; Habakkuk 2:2-3; Psalm 89:20; Proverbs 29:18; Dani’el 2:19; First Chronicles 17:15**).

C. I speak with him in a dream (12:6c). **Dreams** are mentioned alongside of **prophecy** as authentic vehicles of **God’s** revelation (**Deut 13:2,4,6**), and there are several examples of this: **Abimelech (Genesis 20:7), Jacob (Genesis 31:10-13), Solomon (First Kings 3:5-14), and Job (Job 33:14-18)**.

D. But it isn’t that way with my servant Moshe. He is the only one who is faithful in My entire household (12:7). **God** did **speak** through other **prophets**, but only in the veiled form of **visions** and **dreams (First Samuel 9:9 and Deuteronomy 13:7** for example). **Moses**, however, was different. **He** was **God’s** servant, entrusted with all of **God’s** House. **Ha’Shem’s** words strain to describe the intense intimacy of **Himself** and **His** servant.²¹⁵

C. With him I speak face to face (literally in Hebrew **mouth to mouth**) and **clearly (12:8a)**. **Exodus 33:11** had earlier stated that **ADONAI** used to **speak to Moshe face to face**, without fear, **as one speaks to a friend**. **Deuteronomy 34:10** underlines the uniqueness of **Moses** as it describes **his** death outside the Promised Land: **Never since has there arisen a prophet in Isra’el like Moshe, whom ADONAI knew face to face.**²¹⁶

B. Not in riddles (12:8b). Communication between **God** and **Moses** was clear, direct, and unmediated. No riddles. No dark sayings. No dreams to be interpreted and figured out. Instead, amazingly, **God** spoke directly to **him**. **He** heard the audible voice

of YHVH. Whenever **Moses** had a question about something, **he** could just ask **God** and **God** would answer **him**. **Moses** had access to the Most Holy Place. **He** could enter behind the inner veil anytime **he** wanted, any time of year, **he** could simply stop in on **God** and ask a question and receive a direct answer. Earlier in **Numbers** we are told: **Now when Moses went into the Tabernacle to speak to YHVH, he heard the Voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the covenant, from between the two cherubim, so He spoke to him (Numbers 7:8-9).**²¹⁷

A. He sees the image of ADONAI (12:8c). The terminology related to the image (Hebrew: *temunah*) of YHVH used here is also echoed in **Exodus 20:4** and **Deuteronomy 5:8** of the image **the Israelites** were forbidden to make of **their God**. Similarly, in **Deuteronomy 4:12, 15-16, 23, and 25** it describes that **image of God** that **the people** had not seen, as had **Moses**, and therefore should not make as a visible representation of **their God**. Yet **David**, in a state of righteous yearning, prayed that **he** might see this image of **his God (Psalm 17:15)**. **Moses** had indeed been granted a special relationship with **the LORD**, to see that which **Isaiah** saw (see the commentary on **Isaiah Bo - In the Year King Uzziah Died**). **Moshe** had seen plainly and openly, more than any other human had ever imagined. **Ha'Shem** had spoken **face to face as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11)**. This does not mean that **Moshe** literally saw **God's face**, for if **he** had done so **he** would have surely died (**Exodus 33:20**). But, **Moses** did see the back side of **God's Sh'khinah glory as He** passed by **His servant**, who was positioned **in the cleft of the rock** (see the commentary on **Exodus Gz - When My Glory Passes by I Will Put You in the Cleft**). Only **Yeshua**, the Incarnate **Son of God**, had seen **the Father** in the fullness of **His glory**. **He** became what even **Moshe** would have longed to see. **Messiah** said: **If you have seen Me, You have seen the Father (John 14:8-9).**²¹⁸

Conclusion: So why weren't you afraid to criticize My servant Moshe? In light of **God's** special relationship with **Moses**, **they** should have been extremely **afraid** to challenge **his** authority, even if **he** was **their** younger **brother**. **The anger of ADONAI flared up against them, and he left (12:8d-9)**. What we see here is the spreading rebellion against **God** from **the mixed multitude** (see **Bp - Complaining at Tav'erah**) **the people** to the inner circle.

The punishment of Miryam (12:10-16): When we read that **God's anger flared up against them** and then **departed**, we expected dead bodies to be left after the dust settled. **But when the Sh'khinah glory was removed from above the Tabernacle, Miryam had leprosy, as white as snow** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Cg - The Test of**

M'tsora). Aaron looked at Miryam, and she was as white as snow. Here, the repentance of Aaron is both touching in its intensity and in his concern for his sister. Aaron said to Moshe, "Oh, my lord, please don't punish us for this sin we committed so foolishly. Please don't let her be like a stillborn baby, with its body half eaten away when it comes out of its mother's womb" (12:10-12)! This would have rendered her permanently unclean and untouchable, such was the case in **Second Kings 15:5** and **Second Chronicles 26:19-21**. This was an ironic confirmation of what Aaron and Miryam had earlier denied, Moshe's unique relationship with YHVH. And unlike the golden calf incident in which Aaron never acknowledged his sinful role in the idolatry (see the commentary on [Exodus Gg - The Golden Calf Incident](#)), here, Aaron accepts responsibility along with Miryam. Although not fully dead, Miryam's life had been reduced to that of a stillborn baby. She waited to be reborn.²¹⁹

Then, Moshe cried to ADONAI, "Oh God, I beg you, please, heal her" (12:13). As Miryam had saved Moses as a baby in **Exodus 2**, now Moshe returns the favor and intercedes to save his sister in **Numbers 12**. The Mitzvot concerning skin disease in **Leviticus** required a seven-day period of quarantine (**Leviticus 13:5**), and then a seven-day right of purification (**Leviticus 14:1-20**). However, the seven days do not appear to be a period of quarantine or ritual purification in accordance with the mitzvot in **Leviticus**; the seven-day banishment was a sign of the shame she had brought upon herself by rebelling against Moses, and thus against YHVH Himself. Like a parent spitting in a child's face is a sign of shame (**Deuteronomy 25:9**; **Isaiah 50:6**), so God ordered that Miryam bear her sin by being shut out of the camp for a week.²²⁰ The response of YHVH was graciousness mingled with sobriety. She was defiled, rebuked, and shamed publicly, as if spat upon by her father. So let her be shut out of the camp for seven days; after that, she can be brought back in." Miryam was shut out of the camp for seven days, and the people did not travel until she was brought back in. So, Miryam caused a delay in the progress towards the Promised Land. Afterwards, the people went on from Hazerot and camped in the Pa'ran Desert (12:14-16).²²¹

Why did Miryam alone suffer the punishment of leprosy and not Aaron, when he was clearly as involved as Miryam in their rebellion against Moses? But the necessity of ritual purity (see the commentary on [Leviticus Bj - The Mitzvot of Purification](#)) while he served as high priest needed to be spared. Ultimately, Miryam will be treated equally with her two brothers, co-leaders of the people of Isra'el. They will all join with the rest of the Exodus generation and die outside the Promised Land. The judgment will be all-inclusive, including men and women over twenty-years of age.²²²

We now come to the last section of commentary on this portion. The text of **Numbers 12** focuses attention of **Moshe's** life, especially on those things that made **him** a great **leader**. Let us do the same now and see how many godly characteristics of **Moses, the leader**, we can discover. When we do so, we can safely assume that just as **ADONAI** molded this man to walk after **Him, He** also does the same with us. Those things which characterized this **leader** also characterize the new creation believer. **Why was Moshe such a great leader?**

He took His problems to God. When you **lead** almost three million people, there is hardly ever a moment when you are not facing a problem. Our text relates that one of the habitual problems of **the Israelites** happened to have been rebellion, both against **God** and against **Moshe, God's appointed leader**. Such a problem is usually the end of most leaders if it is not handled properly. But, **Moses** was not your typical **leader**. We read continually that when problems arose, **Moshe** took all of them directly to **YHVH**, sometimes even in the privacy of **the Most Holy Place** where fellowship between **them** was the most intimate. A **leader** cannot afford to handle his or her problems in any other way. They may choose to share the wisdom gained with others. But, ultimately, they must be shared openly and honestly with **the only One Who** is full of wisdom and truth.

He was honest with God. When confronted with the new rebellion about **food** (see **Br - Quail and Manna from ADONAI**), **Moses** had had enough (not of **food**, but complaints)! **He** was ready to quit. **He** said that **he** would rather **die** than continue in such a **leadership** position. And, the Bible tells us that **he** went right to **Ha'Shem** with how **he** felt and thought. When **he** did so, while not being disrespectful, **he**, nevertheless, was completely honest with **his** feelings and thoughts to **the Holy One**. **He** knew and trusted **the LORD** well enough to know that even if **he** did **sin, God is faithful and just to forgive sin and to cleanse of all unrighteousness (First John 1:9)**.

He was willing to sacrifice for the good of the people. **ADONAI** endowed **Moses** with two spiritual gifts; **leadership** and **prophecy** (see the commentary on **Romans Dc - Responding to the Mercies of ADONAI**). In fact, **Moses** demonstrated **his leadership** ability when **he** willingly shared **his leadership** with **the seventy elders**, but actually asked for a plurality of **leadership** to be put in place (see **Bt - ADONAI's Response**). In addition, the Torah states that **the prophetic** office of **Moshe** would serve as a model for **the prophetic** office of **Messiah Himself** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Dk - A Prophet Like Moses**). He also was willing to share **his prophetic** ministry. Can you imagine the pressure of being the only one? At least that's what **Miryam** and **Aaron** thought. But **Moses** didn't regard **his** gift of **prophecy** as something for only **himself**. In **Chapter 11** when **Eldad** and **Medad** were freely **prophesying** around the camp, **Moshe's**

chief aid, **Joshua**, tried to stop **them**. Rather than being threatened by the public demonstration of the gifts of **the Spirit**, **Moshe replied**, “**Are you so zealous to protect me? I wish all of ADONAI ’s people were prophets! I wish ADONAI would put His Spirit on all of them**” (11:29).

He did not act defensively. Many **leaders**, when challenged in any of their decisions or ideas, sometimes act in a defensive manner. They do so, perhaps, out of insecurity. If they are trying to derive personal worth and identity from what they do and say, they are easily prone to such behavior. When it comes out, it usually manifests itself in short curt answers, haughty attitudes, judging the one who challenged them, or just plain lack of kindness. **Moshe** was not like that. When challenged by **his** family, those who were supposed to know **him** best, **he** responded in love and kindness by interceding for **his sister**, **crying out to ADONAI**, “**Oh God, I beg you, please, heal her**” (12:13).

He heard from God in an intimate way. One thing that certainly characterized **Moshe’s leadership** was **his** intimate relationship with **YHVH**. In fact, I would say that this was the one thing which caused the rest of **his** positive characteristics to show themselves. When **Miryam** and **Aaron** challenged **him**, **God Himself** came to **Moses’** defense. **He** said a most remarkable thing about **His servant**. **He** said: **Listen to what I say: when there is a prophet among you, I, ADONAI, make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. But it isn’t that way with My servant Moshe. He is the only one who is faithful in My entire household. With him I speak face to face and clearly, not in riddles; he sees the image of ADONAI. So why weren’t you afraid to criticize my servant Moshe (12:6-8)?** God said that **Moshe** was the most trusted one in all **Isra’el** because **they** (**Moses** and **God**) met each other in an intimate way.

Summary: Moshe was more humble than anyone else! If there was one word that would characterize **Moshe** both as a man and as a **leader**, it would be **humility**. This is what **God Himself** said: **Now Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth (12:3)**. How else could **Moshe** have walked in the essential characteristics of **leadership** described above, if **he** were not a **humble** man? A key to **his leadership** was that **Moses** was not self-serving; **he** was **the servant** of **YHVH**. **He** was **the only one who** was **faithful in God’s entire household (12:7)**. If a **leader** has **his** mind on **himself**, **his** image, **his** well-being, **his** goals and aspirations, **he** will inevitably walk in the flesh and the sheep would not be able to feel safe around **him**. But if **he** has **his** thoughts centered on serving **God** and **His** sheep, then **he** will be a safe **leader**. This is the godly **leader**; this is how **Yeshua Messiah Himself** walked. **For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many** (Matthew

20:28).²²³

Haftarah B'ha'alotkha: Zechariah 2:14 - 4:7

(see the commentary on [Deuteronomy Af](#) - Parashah)

God comes to Jerusalem! Sing, daughter of Tziyon; rejoice! For, here, I am coming; and I will live among you," says ADONAI. When that time comes, many nations will join themselves to ADONAI. "They will be my people, and I will live among you." Then you will know that it was ADONAI-Tzva'ot who sent me to you (Zechariah 2:14-14). The journey that had begun in the wilderness ends at **the Temple. Joshua the high priest** is made pure - cleansed of **the sin** that caused the destruction and exile (**Zechariah 3:4**). **He** is commanded to walk with ADONAI and await ADONAI's servant, **Tsemach (the Branch)**. **Not by might, nor by power, but by God's Spirit shall the work be accomplished (Zechariah 4:6).** **The menorah** will no longer require the vigilance of the priests to work through the night because **it** will receive an unending supply of **olive oil** straight from **the olive oil trees in the Land!** All **the nations** will acknowledge the exalted role of **Isra'el** among **the Gentiles**. **YHVH** will level **the mountain** to make room for a special gift of **grace**. All will see **the Temple on the mountain**, shouting **Grace! Grace (Zechariah 4:7)!**

B'rit Chadashah B'ha'alotkha: Revelation 11:19

What begins with **the Tribulation Temple** (see the commentary on [Revelation Bx](#) - **The Tribulation Temple**), and the mission of the two witnesses (see [Revelation Dc](#) - **I Will Give Power to My Two Witnesses to Prophecy**), culminates in the rescue of **the remnant** (see the commentary on [Isaiah Kg](#) - **The Second Coming of Jesus Christ to Bozrah**). Judgment begins and **the Temple of God** opens to the eyes of those on earth. **The ark of the covenant** becomes visible in a Sinai kind of experience witnessed by all (see [Revelation Dx](#) - **The Seventh Trumpet: God's Temple in Heaven**)! Miracles leap from the text! **The two witnesses** have the power to shut up the skies, causing **famine for three-and-a-half-years (Revelation 11:3)**. This event comes as the nations have the power to **trample the outer court** for the same time period (**11:2**). **The two witnesses** are slain and lay unburied for **three-and-a-half-days**; but then are raised to life and raptured into heaven, in full view of those who celebrated **their** deaths (see [Revelation Dm](#) - **The Resurrection of the Two Witnesses**). The stage is set for the spiritual journey to culminate with heaven coming to earth!²²⁴

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, praise you for **Your** faithful love that allows me to come to **You** with*

my problems. One thing that made **Moshe** great was that **he** took **his** problems to **God**. **Moses** had some very big problems, but no problem is too big for **You**. **You** desire me to always run to **You** and fellowship with **You**, not just about problems but also offering plenty of praise, for **You** are always good!

You desire to use my problems to bless me. **Your** heart is so gracious and kind that **You** can even turn hard times into times of eternal blessing. **These trials are so that the true metal of your faith (far more valuable than gold, which perishes though refined by fire) may come to light in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Messiah Yeshua (First Peter 1:7)**. I can't imagine how anything could be better than living forever in **Your** eternal perfect heaven, but more than that, **You** even promise that **You** will reward those who serve **You** with a faithful and loving heart (**First Corinthians 3:11-14**). **You** are so worthy to receive all worship and praise! I praise **You** my Holy, Almighty, All-Powerful, All-Wise, Forgiving **Savior** and Loving **Father**. I look forward to praising **You** thru out all eternity! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** Resurrection. Amen