

Numbers 12:1-3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-12/numbers-121-3/>

Not long after the people complained about the LORD's provision of food, Miriam and Aaron complained about Moses. They seemed to complain about his marriage to a Cushite woman, and they appeared to rebel against him being the only one to whom the LORD communicated.

The Israelites had travelled to Hazeroth and had made camp there. It was here that *Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses* (v. 1). Actually, it was Miriam that *spoke against* Moses in light of the fact that the word *spoke* here is in the feminine singular form. It would then be implied that Aaron went along with his sister. The reason why they/she *spoke against* their younger brother Moses was *because of the Cushite woman whom he had married*. Cush was the ancient name for a nation that was located south of Egypt. This woman was probably not Zipporah (Exodus 2:21) but another woman that went with the Israelites when they left Egypt.

Though this was the stated reason for their rebellious attitude, their rationale could have been that they questioned his judgment. They may have thought that he should have married an Israelite woman, since the people of Israel were the ones chosen by God to be His people. That Moses would marry a non-Israelite (*for he had married a Cushite woman*) might have been, in their view, evidence of poor judgment. However, the next verse indicates that their true underlying reason was jealousy, and a desire to gain part of Moses's influence. It was a desire for power and the recognition that attends it.

In light of this, Miriam and Aaron asked another question—*has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?* (v. 2). They had reasons to have this viewpoint. The LORD used Miriam to save Moses' life when he was a baby (Exodus 2:1–9). She was called a *prophetess* in the celebration of the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 15:20).

She might have wondered why the *seventy men* received the Holy Spirit and prophesied (Numbers 11:25), and she did not receive the Holy Spirit. Having the Holy Spirit gave them authority in the camp, and she apparently wanted the same authority. After all, she was Moses' sister, and since he had the Holy Spirit, perhaps she thought that she should have the Spirit also.

In any case, this appears to be a desire on both of their parts to acquire the same authority as Moses. Aaron was commissioned by the LORD to be Moses's mouthpiece (Exodus 4:14–16). Now it appears they used what they perceived as a lapse in judgement on the part of Moses to elevate themselves and usurp his authority.

Ominously, *the Lord heard it*. He responded instead of Moses, because *the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth* (v. 3). This infers that God intervened because he knew Moses would not contend for his own authority. We saw this evidenced when Moses refused to be jealous for his authority when two men prophesied in the camp (11:26-30).

The fact that this statement about Moses's humility is included in a text that is attributed to Moses creates a conundrum: Would the most humble man in all the earth write of himself that he was the most humble man in all the earth?

Some think that Moses would never boast that he was humbler *than any man who was on the face of the earth*, and conclude this text was added by another writer or editor. This is supported by the wording, as *now the man Moses* does seem to indicate a parenthetical addition, as the NASB translation indicates.

Also, it would certainly seem reasonable that Moses would use a team of people to compile and write the first five books of the Bible. So perhaps one of them added this statement about Moses's humility. Others think that the Hebrew word for *humble* (“anav”) could be translated “miserable” or “afflicted.” However, that does not seem to fit the context well, as the point of the story seems to be that the LORD intervened for Moses rather than Moses defending his own position.

If one takes the definition of humility as being “One who is willing to see reality as it is,” then perhaps Moses wrote this about himself. We know that all scripture is inspired by God, so perhaps Moses wrote this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). It does seem that holding authority with an open hand, living with the reality that God is the true authority, is a leadership characteristic that greatly pleases God. We see it here with Moses, who we are told is the model of humility. We also see it with King David, a man after God's own heart. When David was deposed by his son Absalom, he refused to take vengeance on a man cursing him (2 Samuel 16:11-12).

In any case Moses, at least on this occasion, did not respond to Miriam and Aaron, but the LORD did.

Biblical Text

¹ Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); 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. ³ (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)