

Numbers 12:4-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-12/numbers-124-8/>

The LORD confronted Miriam and Aaron about their rebellious attitudes. He confirmed again that He had a special relationship with Moses, closer than He had with the prophets. This was seen in that He spoke to Moses personally instead of through dreams and visions. Because of that, Miriam and Aaron should have respected that relationship and should have been afraid to oppose it.

The LORD did not let any period of time pass before responding to Miriam and Aaron's rebellion against Moses. Instead, *suddenly the Lord said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam* (v. 4). The word for *suddenly* (Hebrew "pith'om") implies something that happened "immediately" or "in the blink of an eye." This word occurs twenty-five times in the Old Testament, and in all of them it was used in a context of disaster or judgment, including here. The LORD did not let the situation linger—He quickly confronted them.

The LORD commanded that Moses, Aaron, and Miriam *come out to the tent of meeting*. The LORD called them into His presence. Obediently, and probably with some sense of dread, *the three of them came out*.

Once they arrived at the tabernacle, *the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent* (v. 5). The *pillar of cloud* was the visible indication of His presence. Then, *He called Aaron and Miriam* to speak specifically to them. So, *when they had both come forward*, the LORD directed His comments to them. It was to them (Miriam and Aaron, not Moses) that *He* spoke. These verses contain the LORD's defense of Moses. This defense (called by some the "Oracle of the LORD") was written as poetry.

The LORD starts His poem by commanding those present to *hear now My words*. He started with a condition—*if there is a prophet among you*. This was relevant because Miriam was called a prophetess (Exodus 15:20), and because of this she apparently assumed that she had equal status with the LORD as had her brother Moses and therefore equal authority among the people.

He then stated that it was to a prophet *that I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision and I shall speak with him in a dream*. The word *vision* (Heb. "mar'ah") comes from the Hebrew word for "to see" ("ra'ah") and is common when referring to God's communication to His prophets (1 Samuel 3:15; Ezekiel 11:24; Daniel 8:16, 27). It is clear here that God did not speak to Miriam or Aaron in a vision or dream encouraging her to take this path.

Further, Moses has a higher station compared to other prophets. The LORD communicated to prophets using visions, but it was *not so with His servant Moses*, who he spoke to face to face (v. 7). In spite of Moses's occasional failures, the LORD stated that *he is faithful in all My household*.

As opposed to speaking to him in visions and dreams like the prophets, the LORD said that *with him I speak mouth to mouth* (v. 8), or “face to face.” This meant that His communication with Moses was a more direct and personal form of communication, such as what friends have.

Not only that, He spoke to Moses *even openly, and not in dark sayings*, as He did with prophets. That is, He did not speak to Moses using riddles or sentences or questions that would be difficult to understand. Instead, the LORD spoke to Moses in a manner that was clear and easily understandable.

Also, not only was Moses having close interaction with the LORD, He said that *he beholds the form of the Lord*. This does not mean that he could look upon the very person of God, because no one could do this and live (Exodus 33:20, 1 Timothy 6:16). He was, however, able to see some form/likeness of the LORD, even His back (Exodus 33:23). This was a privilege not given to any other person. In other words, Moses was in closer contact and fellowship than any prophet.

The LORD then confronted Miriam and Aaron. In light of His special relationship with Moses, He asked them *why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses?* How could they dare to have thought that they were on equal footing with Moses in his relationship to the LORD and his authority over the people? They had known about this special bond, yet they rebelled against it. In effect, this was a rebellion against the LORD Himself and a rejection of His will.

The principle of properly respecting authorities is set forth in the New Testament in a number of ways. We are to respect human authorities (Romans 13:1). We are to respect church authorities (1 Peter 5:5-6). We are to properly respect spiritual authorities (Jude 1:8-9). Here Aaron and Miriam paid a dear price for failing to respect Moses’s authority, which was granted to him by God.

Biblical Text

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. 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, 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.

⁷ “Not so, with My servant Moses,

He is faithful in all My household;

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?”