

# Numbers 12:9-15

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-12/numbers-129-15/>

*When the cloud of the LORD departed from His meeting with Moses, Miriam, and Aaron, it became obvious that Miriam had a skin disease, probably leprosy. Aaron asked Moses to intercede and petition the LORD to heal her. Instead of healing her immediately, the LORD told Moses that she had to go through the process specified in the Law. She was to be placed outside the camp for seven days and then be allowed to enter the camp. The people stayed where they were until the seven days were completed.*

The LORD's wording in verses 6–8 made it obvious that *the anger of the Lord burned against them* (v. 9). And then suddenly *He departed*. The LORD's departure meant that the cloud that represented the LORD's presence left them.

It happened that *when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow* (v. 10). Lifting the cloud revealed a shocking sight—Miriam, Moses's sister, was covered with a skin disease that looked like leprosy. The word for *leprous* (Hebrew “tsara’at”) can refer to various kinds of skin disease in general and leprosy in particular.

Leprosy was used by the LORD to punish sin (for example, Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26:21). According to the Law, those having such a skin disease (including leprosy) were to be separated from the Israelite camp (Leviticus 13:2ff, 14:3–7). The LORD demonstrated His divine sovereignty when He healed Moses of leprosy (Exodus 4:6), and Jesus healed a leper (Matthew 8:3), showing His divine sovereignty as well.

After the cloud of the LORD's presence lifted, *Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was leprous*. Obviously shocked at what he saw, *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* (v. 11). Aaron admitted his wrongdoing and asked for mercy. This shows his connection with Miriam in the plot. Though not afflicted with leprosy, he confessed that both he and his sister had sinned against the LORD and thus petitioned Moses to intercede for them.

Aaron used graphic imagery to persuade Moses to intercede for him and Miriam. He asked his brother to *not let her be like one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes from his mother's womb!* (v. 12). This disturbing image resembled the appearance of a stillborn baby. It must have been horrific for Aaron to see his sister looking like this.

Responding to Aaron's impassioned plea, *Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “O God, heal her, I pray!* (v. 13). He addressed God as *God* (Heb. “El”) the Creator, not the LORD (Heb. “Yahweh”) the Covenant-Maker. Moses was appealing to the God Who created the earth and everything in it, and it was He Who could restore Miriam's physical condition.

Moses asked for the immediate healing of his sister, *but the Lord said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days?"* (v. 14). Spitting in one's face was a sign of contempt (Deuteronomy 25:9), and being spat upon by her father would have been a disgrace. She would have had to be out of the camp for seven days for this.

Miriam's offense was much worse than this. Nevertheless, the punishment was the same—*Let her be shut up for seven days outside the camp, and afterward she may be received again*. This is in agreement with the law specified in Leviticus 13–14. In spite of the seriousness of her offense, the LORD showed grace to her by imposing a punishment designed for a lesser offense.

The sentence was carried out when *Miriam was shut up outside the camp for seven days* (v. 15). As a result, *the people did not move on until Miriam was received again*, meaning they stayed at Hazeroth an extra seven days.

It is interesting that Aaron was not judged but Miriam was. Perhaps Aaron's sin was in failing to intervene or oppose the claim of his sister.

Moses was hesitant to lead Israel, apparently at least in part because he took the responsibility so seriously (Numbers 11:11-12). But when his authority was challenged, he took no exception (Numbers 11:28). And now when he is personally affronted, he refuses to take it personally. He does the same for his sister as he did for Israel when God told Moses He intended to eliminate the people and start a new nation with him as the patriarch—Moses interceded in prayer (Exodus 32:10-14). In each case, God answered Moses's prayer, and restored the offending party, Miriam in this section, and the entire Nation in Exodus 32.

All this supports the assertion that Moses was the most humble man in all the earth (Numbers 12:3).

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>9</sup> So the anger of the Lord burned against them and He departed. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Oh, do not let her be like one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes from his mother's womb!" <sup>13</sup> Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "O God, heal her, I pray!" <sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>15</sup> So Miriam was shut up outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until Miriam was received again.**