

## 12.27 Miriam and Aaron Complain Against Moses (Numbers 11:35; 12:1–15; 33:17)

(The teacher might combine this story with “12.26 Seventy Elders; the Plague of Quail.”)

✓ “Check” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows.

[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that should not be read aloud. It also indicates answers to questions.

### Visuals and Tools:

- “Life of Moses” Series 3 Flash-a-Cards from A Beka Book and/or pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional needed materials.
- Nancy Ganz’s treatment of this story is excellent in *Numbers: A Commentary for Children*, published by Shepherd Press, 2006.

**Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach:** Tips and terms are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *meekness*: quiet submission to God’s will
- *leprous*: having leprosy

### Scripture

Numbers 12:1 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 also?” And the Lord heard it. 3 Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth. 4 And suddenly the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, “Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting.” And the three of them came out. 5 And the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward. 6 And he said, “Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. 7 Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. 8 With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” 9 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he departed.

10 When the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, like snow. And Aaron turned toward Miriam, and behold, she was leprous. 11 And Aaron said to Moses, “Oh, my lord, do not punish us because we have done foolishly and have sinned. 12 Let her not be as one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes out of his mother’s womb.” 13 And Moses cried to the Lord, “O God, please heal her—please.” 14 But the Lord said to Moses, “If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut outside the camp seven days, and after that she may be brought in again.” 15 So Miriam was shut outside the camp seven days, and the people did not set out on the march till Miriam was brought in again. 16 After that the people set out from Hazeroth, and camped in the wilderness of Paran.

### Introduction/Review:

When had the Israelites left Egypt—on what specific night? [Passover.] That Passover feast was on the fourteenth day of the month God said was to be the first month, Abib, on their calendar. From that fourteenth day of the first month until the fifteenth day of the second month, the Israelites had endured a few tests and blessings:

1. The Red Sea. What happened here? [The Egyptians were coming, and there was no place for the Israelites to go. God opened the Red Sea to let the people go across on dry ground. The Egyptians followed and drowned.]
2. Marah. After three days’ travel, the people had found only sour water. How did God take care of this problem? [Moses put a tree into the water; the water was sweetened.]

3. Elim. Here the people stayed for a few days. It was a place with seventy palm trees and twelve wells of water.
4. The people complained because no food was available. God began to give manna to eat on the fifteenth day of the second month.

From that time through the third month, these events took place:

1. Rephidim. The people had no water. God told Moses to do what to a rock in order to get water? [Strike/hit it.] There was plenty of water for the whole bunch of people (2.5 million).
2. The Amalekites fought the feeble in Rephidim. How did God take care of this problem? [Moses' hands were held up, and the battle went the Israelites' way.]
3. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, visited and suggested Moses divide his responsibilities. Moses set up captains over 1000, 100, 50, and 10 so that they could judge when problems arose.

In the third month the people moved to Mount Sinai and stayed there almost a year. What happened during their stay at Sinai?

1. God made a covenant with them.
2. Moses, Aaron, and the elders went up on the mountain, saw God, and lived.
3. Moses went up the mountain, staying forty days, getting the Law.
4. The people made a golden calf and worshiped it. Moses ground it, scattered it on the water for the people to drink. God slew many people.
5. God said He wouldn't go with the people, but Moses pled that God's presence go with them. God relented.
6. Moses went up on the mountain another forty days to get the Law and instructions for worship.
7. Bezalel and Aholiab used the donated gold, silver, *etc.*, to make the tabernacle and the priests' clothes.
8. On the first day of the first month of the second year, the tabernacle was erected and the pillar of cloud covered it.
9. The priests were consecrated in a seven-day ritual.
10. God sent fire to burn the sacrifice on the bronze altar.
11. Nadab and Abihu offered "strange fire" and incense and were killed by fire from God.
12. On the fourteenth day of the first month of the second year, the people celebrated the Passover again.
13. On the first day of the second month of the second year, the censuses of the soldiers and Levites began.
14. On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the Lord signaled the Israelites to move. God had directed the exact order in which all the tribes were to move. He had directed the exact tabernacle items each clan in the tribe of Levi was to carry.

Israel had moved away from Mount Sinai only three days' journey. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the second month of the second year, people began to complain. What happened after this first complaint? [God sent fire to burn in the outskirts of the camp.]

At about the same time, more complainers wanted meat, so God gave the people what? [Quail; He also sent a plague.]

## Story:

### *Moses' marriage*

But the Israelite multitudes were not the only complainers. Two people very close to Moses stirred up a new complaint when Moses married a Cushite woman. We don't know what had happened to Moses' wife, the daughter of Jethro and the father of his two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. ✓She probably had died. So Moses married another woman—a Cushite, ✓likely a black lady.

### *Aaron and Miriam's criticism*

Aaron and Miriam, Moses' own brother and sister, did not like the fact that Moses had married this woman. They transferred this dislike to Moses himself, saying to themselves, "Moses isn't so great a leader. We can

do just as well. ✓After all, aren't we his older siblings?"

As is so often the case, the inner grumblings of Aaron and Miriam soon became vocal. "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't He also spoken through us?"

What?! Were the high priest and his respected sister questioning God's choice? Had Moses chosen this position? No! Had he not even complained to God that the burden was too much for him when the people had demanded meat to eat? Yes! Who would want this heavy responsibility anyway? Aaron and Miriam were rebelling against God in their criticism and in their ambition!

### ***Moses' meekness***

Now, the Bible gives us a little commentary on the life and character of Moses here. This is what it says: "The man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth." The word *meek* sounds like the word *weak*, but meekness is not weakness! Meekness is quiet submission to God's will, especially when one wants to get very angry.

✓Moses likely wanted to lash out at Aaron and Miriam. He knew he wasn't seeking self-advancement but was submitting himself to God, trusting God to take care of the situation. Moses didn't say anything to Aaron and Miriam.

### ***God's response***

God, however, was not silent. When He heard the accusations and saw the ambitions of Aaron and Miriam, the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent. He called Moses, Aaron, and Miriam: "Come out to the tent, all three of you."

Then He called Aaron and Miriam forward and said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord usually make Myself known to him in a vision during the day or in a dream at night. Not so with my servant Moses. He is so faithful that I speak face to face with him; I speak clearly and not in riddles. He has even seen the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

In other words, God was saying that Moses was a prophet far above all other prophets. Even today as we look over the whole Bible and compare all the other prophets, Moses stands out above them all. He was a true type of our Lord Jesus in many ways.

### ***Miriam's leprosy***

The Lord was angry with Aaron and Miriam, and He left the tabernacle, lifting the cloud from over the tent. When the cloud was gone, Aaron turned toward Miriam. [Teacher, open your eyes wide as you say the next sentence.] As he looked upon her ✓chalky and bumpy skin, he exclaimed, "Miriam! You have leprosy!"\*

Then Aaron turned to Moses. "Oh, my lord," he pled ✓humbly and yet frantically. "Do not punish us; we have done foolishly and have sinned! Let Miriam not be as one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away!"

✓Compassionate, forgiving, and meek, Moses cried to the Lord, "O God, please heal her—please!"

The Lord answered, "If her father had humiliated her, shouldn't she be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut outside the camp seven days, and after that she may be brought in again."

So Miriam had to live outside the camp seven days. Would that mean she couldn't travel with the others? Normally, yes. But the Lord was gracious and did not lead the people to another place until the seven days were over and Miriam was totally healed and back in the camp again.

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\*"She had reviled a black woman because of her skin; now Miriam was reviled because of her skin! . . . When Moses met with the Lord, he returned with a face full of glory; but when Miriam met with the Lord, she returned with a face full of leprosy!" (Ganz).

## Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:  
Moses' being the most meek among humans is surpassed by the perfect meekness of Jesus Christ: "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).
- Trust the Lord instead of complaining.
- Our leaders, even though elected by the people and often foolish, are appointed by God. Refuse to complain about them.

## Activities:

- Play dough: cloud; two men; one woman
- Snack: Meringue cookies that look like clouds. A recipe may be found at <https://www.food.com/recipe/meringue-cookies-45456>.
- Discuss leprosy: It is a disease in which nerves do not feel pain. It appears as a skin problem that turns the skin and hair white. It was considered extremely contagious; so lepers were forced to live separately from the general population.

Special inspections and sacrifices by the high priest were required for a person to be declared healed. These inspections and sacrifices occurred over a period of eight days. (See Leviticus 13 and 14.)

Leprosy is a type of sin, cured only by God.

- Discuss Miriam's life: She watched Baby Moses in his basket-boat. She got a nurse, Moses' mother, for Moses' nourishment and care when the princess of Egypt adopted him. She led God-exalting praise after the Israelites' deliverance through the Red Sea. It is thought she was the wife of Hur, one of the men who held up Moses' hands during the battle with the Amalekites.
- Review questions: (Game: A student who answers a question correctly will get to eat a mini marshmallow.)
  1. Why did Aaron and Miriam complain about Moses? [He had married a Cushite woman.]
  2. What kind of ambitions did Aaron and Miriam have for themselves? [They thought they could lead the Israelites as well as Moses.]
  3. What did God think of Aaron and Miriam's complaint? [He was angry with them.]
  4. To where did God summon Aaron, Miriam, and Moses? [To the entrance of the tent of meeting.]
  5. How did God reveal Himself to the three? [In the pillar of cloud that descended at the tent entrance.]
  6. How was Moses superior to other prophets? [God spoke to Moses face to face, not in dreams or visions; Moses had even seen the form of God.]
  7. What one word describes Moses? He was \_\_\_\_\_ more than anyone on the earth. [Meek.]
  8. What does meekness mean? [Quiet submission to God's will.]
  9. Who pled for Miriam's healing, and what did he ask? [Aaron; "Oh, my lord, do not punish us because we have done foolishly and have sinned! Let her not be as one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away!"]
  10. What was God's gracious answer to Moses' prayer for Miriam's healing? [He healed her, but she had to stay outside the camp seven days.]

## Memory Verse[s]:

- Exodus 20:1–17. An enlarged copy of the words, the "Exodus 20:1–17" song sheet, and motions are in Lesson 12.15 or on the "Lessons" and "Songs" pages at [teachingthebibleto kids.org](http://teachingthebibleto kids.org). "Stop! It's the Law," a song that teaches only the basic Ten Commandments, is found on the same "Songs" page.

**Handwork:**

- Have students color a page that has to do with the previous lesson about the people's craving meat. Three pages can be found at <https://craftingthewordofgod.files.wordpress.com/2017/09/israelites-complain-coloring-pages.pdf>.

*meekness*

*leprous*

| <b>Event</b>          | <b>Time</b>                               | <b>Elapsed Months</b> | <b>Elapsed Year</b> |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|---------------------|
| First Passover        | 1 <sup>st</sup> mo., 14 <sup>th</sup> day |                       |                     |
| Red Sea               |   |                       |                     |
| Water at Marah        |   |                       |                     |
| Elim                  |   |                       |                     |
| Manna                 | 2 <sup>nd</sup> mo., 15 <sup>th</sup> day | 1 mo.                 |                     |
| Rephidim Water        |   |                       |                     |
| Amalekites Fight      |   |                       |                     |
| Jethro Visits         |   |                       |                     |
| Sinai Wilderness      | 3 <sup>rd</sup> mo.                       | 1 mo.                 |                     |
| 10 Commandments       |   |                       |                     |
| Glory of God          |   |                       |                     |
| Golden Calf           |   |                       |                     |
| God's Tent            |   |                       |                     |
| Levites counted       |   | 9 ½ mo.               |                     |
| Tabernacle Set Up     | 1 <sup>st</sup> mo., 1 <sup>st</sup> day  |                       |                     |
| Priests Consecrated   | (7 days)                                  |                       |                     |
| Fire of God           |   |                       |                     |
| Nadab and Abihu       |   |                       |                     |
| Feasts & Sacrifices   |   |                       |                     |
| Passover              | 1 <sup>st</sup> mo., 14 <sup>th</sup> day | ½ mo.                 | 1 year              |
| Census & Organization | 2 <sup>nd</sup> mo., 1 <sup>st</sup> day  | 1 mo.                 |                     |
| Moving                | 2 <sup>nd</sup> mo., 20 <sup>th</sup> day |                       |                     |
| Complaint at Taberah  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> mo., 23 <sup>rd</sup> day |                       |                     |
| Complaint for Meat    |   |                       |                     |















