

Older siblings can resent the success and position of their younger siblings and this dynamic is seen here. Miriam was much older than her brothers, she did not resent the status of her male siblings because they were male, but she was annoyed because it was in the case of his relationship partner that Moses had erred. He had let them down over matters concerning females.

In Micah 6v4 the divine record details that it was all three whom God had set up at that time before the nation of Israel. The three siblings are mentioned in reverse age order. It is not automatic that the younger defer to the elder. Miriam the eldest is mentioned last. They usually worked together well, but here there was tension. Aaron was Moses elder brother, he did not grow up with his younger brother who was taken to the Egyptian court but was very aware of him as their faithful parents Amram and Jochebed who knew he was “*a proper child*” and did not fear the royal decree, Hebrews 11v23. What takes precedence in the eyes of God, and therefore should be in our eyes also, is the spirituality of the individuals, not their physical age.

Who was this Cushite woman whom Moses had taken? The KJV says “married” but that is not what the Hebrew says, “taken” is a more accurate translation. She was not Zipporah who was a Midianite, who he married in the wilderness. Josephus says that she was a woman from his Egyptian past, which was not a new phenomenon they brought up, but a remembrance of a previous misdemeanour which they used to question his integrity. He had not married in the faith, but taken a strange wife, was she a gentile convert? We are not told but seeing that this seemed to be a weakness in him they had reminded him of, perhaps not.

Past sins can have a hold over us. In Christ all sins are forgiven, our past sins at baptism and subsequent sins will be through the mercy of God in Christ, if we truly repent and forgive others. The

ramifications of past transgressions are not to be ignored. A paedophile can be forgiven but you don't put such a person in charge of the Sunday school! A rogue can be forgiven but you do not make him your public presiding brother! Reputation does matter, and it is taught that *"he must have a good report of them that are without"* 1 Timothy 3v7. There is a difference between forgiving and forgetting.

*"Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth"* see verse 3. He refused to defend himself in the light of his own conscience under accusation. He would perhaps have stood down, but there were not contemporaries strong enough to persuade him to continue, it was left to the Almighty to intervene in this standoff. They were all commanded to come to the tabernacle which represented God's presence among them through divine manifestation. The pillar of cloud descended to represent His presence at the door of the tabernacle blocking their way in. This matter had to be resolved if any future entrance into the sacrificial elements of that tabernacle would be possible.

Moses was no ordinary prophet, who spake on God's behalf in various ways, including dreams and visions. He was to behold the similitude of the LORD as he had been chosen to talk with Him *"mouth to mouth even apparently"*. He was special and a great forerunner of the Messiah. The divine verdict was that *"he is faithful in all mine house"* cited in Hebrews 3v5 with the added qualification *"as a servant for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after"*. Moses did God's will on earth to the best of his ability, subject yes to human failures, but better than others whom God did not choose.

To be publicly exposed for hypocrisy is devastating to those who care about integrity. The shame and embarrassment mean little, if we are brazen to the transgression, with a seared conscience. This seems to have been Aaron's fate, but Miriam was punished by becoming leprous. This is not synonymous with sin in the flesh but actual transgression.

Aaron showed his true mind when he said, *“Alas my lord I beseech thee”*. Calling his younger brother “Lord”, demonstrated his own meekness. He was not stricken with any physical punishment but was mindful of his elder sister whom he loved dearly and did not wish to see her *“as one dead of whom the flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother’s womb”*. The imagery is so specific it implies it was something he had personally witnessed under this era of the divine righteous condemnation of sin.

Unlike others he did not seek to distance himself from fault. *“Lay not this sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned.”* He knew that sin always brings death in its wake, when it is finished, and fervently sought that the sin could be covered up and its effects taken out of the way. It was to Moses that he appealed not to God directly. This reinforced the correction of the error to which he had been party. By appealing through God’s chosen mediator, he accepted God’s endorsement of the younger Moses. He was his Lord, his adon.

Did Moses really have the power to lay this sin upon them? Are not all sins against God? Whilst that is certainly true, this chapter focuses upon a sin which involved Moses personally and his role as God’s intermediary for that age. When he petitions God on behalf of his sister he says *“Heal her now O God (El, Ail) I beseech thee”*. The potent creator can do anything in the material world He has made, but what is appropriate is not always considered by our limited minds. Here we are required to raise our gaze beyond mere personal desires and fancies to what is for the greater good.

The response of YHWH is to refer to the principles that underpinned the WORD He had given the nation of Israel to regulate their society. Why should the treatment of Miriam be otherwise? A public exclusion “without the camp” for seven days was deemed necessary to remind the congregation that public sin, and challenging public figures has a public effect. The spitting in the face is mentioned in Deuteronomy 25v9 but there is no wider explanation it seems to be axiomatically accepted then in a way

that has been subsequently undermined, in the same way that parental respect has been largely eroded.

It is like those who criticise Dr Thomas in some way but have nothing more to say than that he was wrong. No alternative is given, no building of a better consensus, because they rarely have better answers. John Thomas immersed himself in the study of the word before Youngs and Strongs concordances existed. Try doing Bible study with just Crudens! Yes, Thayer and Gesenius were available but not number referenced and without some Greek and Hebrew not at all straightforward to unlock their assistance.

Was not God her Father? He spat in her face, and she had to accept it. The bestowal of leprosy was to Him like spitting in her face. A simple matter which expressed His disgust for what she had done in a deeply intimate way. Do we not realise that when we sin, we so offend God personally in a similar way? If only we thought about that more often than we do, we would do it less often if we have any conscience in such matters at all.

Again, the concluding issue is that the whole camp which Miriam was shut out from had to wait for her recovery. There was no moving on without her. Even the act of discipline itself had wider effects than people might initially realise. Justice was to be done, and for the nation of Israel it was important that justice was seen to be done. The movements of the pillar of cloud saw to that. No longer barring the way for any to enter the tabernacle, as the matter had been resolved to the glory of God. *"The cloud departed off the tabernacle"*. Interestingly, this was when the punishment was meted out, not when forgiveness was extended to Miriam, in a mitigation of that punishment and the saving from leprosy which God in grace granted to her.

If left, this cancer would have permeated against the Law itself. Attack the creditability of Moses as God's law giver, is to attack the law itself. See how much a little leaven can leaven the whole lump if left untreated. God did not leave matters to further

corruption. Mankind constantly falls to that low standard and those that claim to be the Truth holders must seek to rise above it!

A Voice from the Altar

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