

Miriam Becomes a Leper

(Numbers 12:1-16)

Introduction

Ask: Do you know what the word “murmur” means? Have you ever murmured about something?

To *murmur* means to mutter negative thoughts under your breath, to complain, or to criticize something that you don't like. The Bible tells us that God dislikes it very much when we murmur or complain.

Let's find out how God teaches Moses' sister and brother an important lesson about how important it is for us to respect people in authority over us.

Opening Prayer

Father, You have placed certain people to be leaders over us—our parents, teachers, and coaches. Give us ears to hear Your voice this morning as You teach us an important lesson about respecting those people that You have given us to lead us and guide us and to protect us. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Do everything without complaining and arguing. (Philippians 2:14)

Lesson

We have been learning about God's people, the Israelites, and their journey through the wilderness. The journey from Egypt to the Promised Land should have only taken a few months. But because the people murmured and complained so much, God made them to wander in the desert for forty long years.

Moses didn't have an easy job taking care of two million people and listening to all their complaining. He was glad he had his older brother and sister to help him.

Remember Moses' older sister Miriam? She was the one who stood at a distance to find out what would happen to baby Moses when their mother put him in a wicker basket and sent it down the Nile river.

Later God used Miriam to speak His heart to the people. She wrote a beautiful worship song thanking God for parting the Red Sea and allowing them to escape from Pharaoh.

Aaron was Moses' older brother. God had been using him to be Moses' right-hand man. But remember what happened when Moses went up on the mountain for forty days?

While Moses was up on the mountain getting the Ten Commandments from God, he left Aaron down at the bottom of the mountain in charge of the people.

Ask: Do you remember what Aaron did while Moses was gone?

The people were getting tired of waiting for Moses to come down off the mountain. So, Aaron gathered all the gold from the people, melted it down and made for them a golden calf to worship.

That was very sinful, yet, when God gave Moses the directions for how to build the Tabernacle, He told Moses to make Aaron the first high priest. It was an honor for Aaron to be used by God to teach the people how to worship Him.

But traveling through the wilderness was hard for the people. They had moved away from their comfortable homes in Egypt and were now living in tents out in the hot desert. Food and water were scarce. Slowly the people began to get an attitude and began to murmur.

The people began to complain and grumble. Some of the people even began to wish they were back in Egypt again living as slaves. They forgot how hard life was for them back in Egypt working as slaves for the Pharaoh.

Soon even Moses' own brother and sister were complaining against him. At first Miriam and Aaron began to make fun of Moses' wife because she was from a foreign country. [Remember, Moses had married his wife when he was over in Midian *before* God called him from the burning bush and told him to lead the people out of Egypt.]

Numbers 12:1

*While they were at Hazeroth, **Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses because he had married a Cushite woman.***

Miriam and Aaron were jealous of Moses.

Numbers 12:2

They said, "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Hasn't he spoken through us, too?" But the LORD heard them.

Ask: Have you ever felt jealous of your brother or sister? [Teacher, let the children respond.]

Miriam and Aaron were older than Moses, they probably thought they could do a better job of leading the people.

It is true that God had used Miriam and Aaron to help Moses, but God had appointed Moses as their leader. But they didn't want to obey him! Instead of following his instructions, they wanted to do their own thing. After all he was only their little brother!

Ask: Do you supposed God heard Miriam and Aaron quarrelling with Moses? Does God hear you if you quarrel with your brother or sister?

God does hear and it makes Him sad. Let's see how Moses reacted to Miriam and Aaron.

Number 12:3

*(Now **Moses was very humble**—more humble than any other person on earth.)*

Moses kept silent when he was attacked by his brother and sister. He trusted that the Lord would take care of the situation for him.

When someone makes fun of you or calls you a name, you need to just keep silent and let God handle the situation. It's really easy to let yourself fight back, but you have to control your anger. God promises to stick up for us.

All of a sudden God's voice rang out.

Numbers 12:4

So immediately the LORD called to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam and said, "Go out to the Tabernacle, all three of you!" So the three of them went to the Tabernacle.

God called Moses, Aaron and Miriam and told them to meet Him at the tent of meeting. Miriam and Aaron probably knew that they were in big trouble with God.

Numbers 12:5

Then the LORD descended in the pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the Tabernacle. "Aaron and Miriam!" he called, and they stepped forward.

When they reached the Tabernacle, God was waiting for them in a cloud. God told Miriam and Aaron to step forward.

Ask: Do you think that Miriam and Aaron were sorry they had questioned Moses' authority?

They were probably afraid of what God might do next. They had good reason to be afraid because God was not pleased with them.

God scolded Aaron and Miriam; He reminded them that He had chosen Moses to be the leader.

Numbers 12:9

The LORD was very angry with them, and he departed.

After God had finished speaking, the cloud with His presence left. As they stood there looking at each other, Moses and Aaron probably gasped in horror.

Numbers 12:10

As the cloud moved from above the Tabernacle, there stood Miriam, her skin as white as snow from leprosy. When Aaron saw what had happened to her,

Their sister Miriam was covered with leprosy. In Bible times leprosy was a very dreaded disease. It is a skin disease that literally eats away your skin and your nerves. A leper's skin was covered with sores. This disease was very contagious; there was no cure for it in those days so people who had it were sent away to live outside the camp for the rest of their lives. They called it *the disease of the walking dead*.

Ask: Can you imagine the horror the three must have experienced?

Even though Miriam and Aaron had rebelled against Moses' spiritual authority, they were brothers and sisters and they still loved each other very much. The moment Miriam became leprous they forgot their jealousy towards Moses. Aaron cried out to Moses and asked him to forgive them for speaking against him.

Numbers 12:11

he cried out to Moses, "Oh, my master! Please don't punish us for this sin we have so foolishly committed.

Then, Moses called to God and asked Him to heal her.

Numbers 12:13

So Moses cried out to the LORD, "O God, I beg you, please heal her!"

When God heard Moses weeping on behalf of his sister, His heart was softened. But He still wanted to teach Miriam a lesson. God wanted her and everyone else to know that it is wrong to disobey the person who is a leader over you. So, God gave Miriam a "time out."

Numbers 12:15

So Miriam was kept outside the camp for seven days, and the people waited until she was brought back before they traveled again.

A week must have seemed like a long time to Miriam. I'm sure she did a lot of thinking and praying during that week. When she returned to the camp, I'm sure she had learned the lesson God wanted her to learn.

God takes sin seriously, especially the sin of speaking against those people that are leaders over you. God expects us to respect authority. He wants us to listen and obey our parents, our teachers, our coaches, our baby sitters, and he even wants us to respect our brothers and sisters, too!

When we sin or do wrong, it separates us from God, just like Miriam had to stay outside the camp for seven days. God doesn't want us to be separated from Him forever. That's why He made a way for us to come to Him. He did this by coming to earth and dying on the cross to take the punishment for our sins. He died in our place for all our wrongs.

If we trust in Jesus and ask Him to forgive us of our sins, He will take us to Heaven to live with Him some day.

Closing Prayer

Father, we are sinners and deserve to be forever separated from You. But You came and took the punishment that we deserve so that we could be forgiven. Thank You that You have made a way for us to come to live with You in heaven. We look forward to that day that we can see You and talk with you face-to-face just like Moses did. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Game Center

Use the following review questions in a game of your choice:

1. Who were Miriam and Aaron? (They were Moses' older sister and brother.)
2. What did Aaron do while Moses was meeting with God up on the mountain? (He made a golden calf for the people to worship.)
3. Why did Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses? (They were jealous of his authority. They didn't want to obey him.)
4. What did Moses do when his brother and sister made fun of his wife? (He kept silent. He didn't try to fight back. He trusted God would take care of the situation.)
5. What did God do when Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses? (He told them to come to the Tabernacle!)
6. What is the Tabernacle? (The temporary church they used while crossing the desert on their way to the Promised Land.)
7. In what form did God show Himself to Miriam and Aaron? (He was in a pillar of cloud.)
8. How was Miriam punished for making fun of Moses' wife? (Suddenly Miriam became leprous.)
9. What is leprosy? (It is a very contagious skin disease that eats away at your skin and nerves. In Bible times there was no cure for it.)
10. When people got leprosy in Bible times what happened to them? (They were sent to live out the rest of their lives away from everyone else.)
11. What did Aaron do the moment he saw what happened to his sister? (He cried out to Moses and asked him to forgive them.)
12. How did God teach Miriam a lesson? (He made her go outside the camp for 7 days, kind of like a "time out.")
13. When we sin or do wrong, it separates us from God. What has God done for us to make it possible for us to come to Him? (He took the punishment for our sins.)

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