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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.

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Miriam and Aaron raise a sedition against Moses, because of the Ethiopian woman he had married, Num 12:1, and through jealousy of his increasing power and authority, Num 12:2. The character of Moses, Num 12:3. Moses, Aaron, and Miriam are suddenly called to the tabernacle, Num 12:4. The Lord appears in the pillar of the cloud, and converses with them, Num 12:5. Declares his purpose to communicate his will to Moses only, Num 12:6-8. His anger is kindled against Miriam, and she is smitten with the leprosy, Num 12:9, Num 12:10. Aaron deplores his transgression, and entreats for Miriam, Num 12:11, Num 12:12. Moses intercedes for her, Num 12:13. The Lord requires that she be shut out of the camp for seven days, Num 12:14. The people rest till she is restored, Num 12:15, and afterwards leave Hazeroth, and pitch in the wilderness of Paran, Num 12:16.

#### Verse 1

Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses - It appears that jealousy of the power and influence of Moses was the real cause of their complaint though his having married an Ethiopian woman-האשה הכשית haishshah haccushith - That Woman, the Cushite, probably meaning Zipporah, who was an Arab born in the land of Midian - was the ostensible cause.

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NUMBERS 12:2 They said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only with Moses? Hasn't he spoken also with us?" And the LORD heard it.

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#### Verse 2

Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? - It is certain that both Aaron and Miriam had received a portion of the prophetic spirit, (see Exo 4:15, and Exo 15:20), and therefore they thought they might have a share in the government; for though there was no kind of gain attached to this government, and no honor but such as came from God, yet the love of power is natural to the human mind; and in many instances men will sacrifice even honor, pleasure, and profit to the lust of power.

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NUMBERS 12:3 Now the man Moses was very humble, above all the men who were on the surface of the earth.

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#### Verse 3

Now the man Moses was very meek - How could Moses, who certainly was as humble and modest as he was meek, write this encomium upon himself? I think the word is not rightly understood; ענו anav, which we translate meek, comes from ענה anah, to act upon, to humble, depress, afflict, and is translated so in many places in the Old Testament; and in this sense it should be understood here: "Now this man Moses was depressed or afflicted more than any man האדמה haadamah, of that

land." And why was he so? Because of the great burden he had to bear in the care and government of this people, and because of their ingratitude and rebellion both against God and himself: of this depression and affliction, see the fullest proof in the preceding chapter, Numbers 11 (note). The very power they envied was oppressive to its possessor, and was more than either of their shoulders could sustain.

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NUMBERS 12:4 The LORD spoke suddenly to Moses, to Aaron, and to Miriam, "You three come out to the Tent of Meeting!" The three of them came out.

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#### Verse 4

And the Lord spake suddenly - The sudden interference of God in this business shows at once the importance of the case and his displeasure.

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NUMBERS 12:5 The LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the Tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward.

NUMBERS 12:6 He said, "Now hear my words. If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, will make myself known to him in a vision. I will speak with him in a dream.

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#### Verse 6

If there be a prophet - We see here the different ways in which God usually made himself known to the prophets, viz., by visions - emblematic appearances, and by dreams, in which the future was announced by dark speeches, בְּחִידוֹת bechidoth, by enigmas or figurative representations, Num 12:8. But to Moses God had communicated himself in a different way - he spoke to him face to face, apparently, showing him his glory: not in dark or enigmatical speeches; this could not be admitted in the case in which Moses was engaged, for he was to receive laws by Divine inspiration, the precepts and expressions of which must all be ad captum vulgi, within the reach of the meanest capacity. As Moses, therefore, was chosen of God to be the lawgiver, so was he chosen to see these laws duly enforced for the benefit of the people among whom he presided.

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NUMBERS 12:7 My servant Moses is not so. He is faithful in all my house.

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#### Verse 7

Moses - is faithful - נֶאֱמָן neeman, a prefect or superintendent. So Samuel is termed, 1Sam 2:35; 1Sam 3:20; David is so called, 1Sam 18:27, Neeman, and son-in-law of the king. Job 12:20, speaks of the Neemanim as a name of dignity. It seems also to have been a title of respect given to ambassadors, Pro 13:17; Pro 25:13. Calmet well observes that the word fidelity is often used for an employ, office, or dignity, and refers to 1Chr 9:22, 1Chr 9:26, 1Chr 9:31; 2Chr 31:12, 2Chr 31:15; 2Chr 34:12, etc. Moses was a faithful, well-trying servant in the house of God, and therefore he uses him as a familiar, and puts confidence in him.

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NUMBERS 12:8 With him, I will speak mouth to mouth, even plainly, and not in riddles; and he shall see the LORD's form. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant, against Moses?"

NUMBERS 12:9 the LORD's anger was kindled against them; and he departed.

NUMBERS 12:10 The cloud departed from over the Tent; and behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. Aaron looked at Miriam, and behold, she was leprous.

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#### Verse 10

Miriam became leprous - It is likely Miriam was chief in this mutiny; and it is probable that it was on this ground she is mentioned first, (see Num 12:1), and punished here, while Aaron is spared. Had he been smitten with the leprosy, his sacred character must have greatly suffered, and perhaps the priesthood itself have fallen into contempt. How many priests and preachers who deserved to be exposed to reproach and infamy, have been spared for the sake of the holy character they bore, that the ministry might not be blamed! But the just God will visit their transgressions in some other way, if they do not deeply deplore them and find mercy through Christ. Nothing tends to discredit the work of God so much as the transgressions and miscarriages of those who minister in holy things.

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NUMBERS 12:11 Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord, please don't count this sin against us, in which we have done foolishly, and in which we have sinned.

NUMBERS 12:12 Let her not, I pray, be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb."

NUMBERS 12:13 Moses cried to the LORD, saying, "Heal her, God, I beg you!"

NUMBERS 12:14 The LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, shouldn't she be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut up outside of the camp seven days, and after that she shall be brought in again."

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#### Verse 14

If her father had but spit in her face - This appears to have been done only in cases of great provocation on the part of the child, and strong irritation on the side of the parent. Spitting in the face was a sign of the deepest contempt. See Job 30:10; Isa 50:6; Mar 14:65. In a case where a parent was obliged by the disobedient conduct of his child to treat him in this way, it appears he was banished from the father's presence for seven days. If then this was an allowed and judged case in matters of high provocation on the part of a child, should not the punishment be equally severe where the creature has rebelled against the Creator? Therefore Miriam was shut out of the camp for seven days, and thus debarred from coming into the presence of God her father, who is represented as dwelling among the people. To a soul who knows the value and inexpressible blessedness of communion with God, how intolerable must seven days of spiritual darkness be! But how indescribably wretched must their case be who are cast out into outer darkness, where the light of God no more shines, and where his approbation can no more be felt for ever! Reader, God save thee from so great a curse!

Several of the fathers suppose there is a great mystery hidden in the quarrel of Miriam and Aaron with Moses and Zipporah. Origen (and after him several others) speaks of it in the following manner: - "1. Zipporah, a Cushite espoused by Moses, evidently points out the choice which Jesus Christ has made of the Gentiles for his spouse and Church.

2. The jealousy of Aaron and Miriam against Moses and Zipporah signifies the hatred and envy of the Jews against Christ and the apostles, when they saw that the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven had been opened to the Gentiles, of which they had rendered themselves unworthy.

3. The leprosy with which Miriam was smitten shows the gross ignorance of the Jews, and the ruinous, disordered state of their religion, in which there is neither a head, a temple, nor a sacrifice.

4. Of none but Jesus Christ can it be said that he was the most meek and patient of men; that he saw God face to face; that he had every thing clearly revealed without enigmatical representations; and that he was faithful in all the house of God." This, and much more, Origen states in the sixth and seventh homilies on the book of Numbers, and yet all this he considers as little in comparison of the vast mysteries that lie hidden in these accounts; for the shortness of the time, and the magnitude of the mysteries, only permit him "to pluck a few flowers from those vast fields - not as many as the exuberance of those fields afford, but only such as by their odour he was led to select from the rest." *Licebat tamen ex ingentibus campis paucos flosculos legere, et non quantum ager exuberet, sed quantum odoratum supiciat, carpere.*

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NUMBERS 12:15 Miriam was shut up outside of the camp seven days, and the people didn't travel until Miriam was brought in again.

NUMBERS 12:16 Afterward the people travelled from Hazeroth, and encamped in the wilderness of Paran.

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#### Verse 16

The wilderness of Paran - This could not be the same Paran with that mentioned Deu 1:1, for that was on the borders of the promised land, see the note on Deu 1:1, Deu 1:2; they were long near the borders of Canaan, and might have speedily entered into it, had it not been for their provocations and iniquities. They spent thirty-eight years in a journey which might have been accomplished in a few weeks! How many through their unfaithfulness have been many years in gaining that for which, in the ordinary procedure of Divine grace, a few days had been sufficient! How much ground may a man lose in the Divine life by one act of unfaithfulness or transgression! Israel wandered in the wilderness because Israel despised the pleasant land, and did not give credence to the word of the Lord. They would have a golden calf, and they had nothing but tribulation and woe in return.