**Miriam and Aaron Oppose Moses**

In 1976, Ronald Reagan made a rare attempt to challenge the incumbent President Gerald Ford for the Republican Party nomination for president. While he was unsuccessful in 1976, he did get his party’s nomination in 1980 and unseated Jimmy Carter in a landslide victory. Ironically, Carter won the Democratic Party’s nomination in 1980 after another rare challenge by Ted Kennedy. Since WW2, these are the only occurrences of incumbent presidents having a primary opponent who actual secured delegates. In both instances, unique circumstances created opportunities for challengers. Ford was an unpopular president representing an unpopular Republican Party in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal. He ascended to the presidency as a result of the resignations in disgrace by Spiro Agnew and Richard Nixon. Carter was seen as a weak and ineffective president and the Iranian hostage crisis underscored that. The saying “When you strike at a king you must kill him” is applicable. Such challenges are rare because they carry the risk of future political reprisal. In our study of Numbers chapter 12, we see 2 people challenging the authority of Moses. Unlike the two presidential examples cited, there were no grounds to unseat Moses as the leader of the Israelites.

The chapter begins with Miriam and Aaron talking against Moses because of his wife. Since she is not named, some speculate that Zipporah had died and that Moses had remarried. Having no basis for a complaint against Moses, they resorted to commenting on the heritage of Moses’ wife. The NIV says that she was a Cushite while the KJV refers to her as an Ethiopian so her skin color may have been the issue raised. They wanted to claim positions as equals to Moses since God had spoken to or through them in the past. God heard what they said and quickly called them to account. He summoned Moses, Miriam and Aaron to the Tent of Meeting where he stood in a pillar of cloud. He confronted Miriam and Aaron telling them that a prophet was limited to receiving visions from God unlike Moses who had the distinct honor of conversing with God. They should have realized that Moses was chosen by God to lead the Israelites and that challenging his authority was actually challenging God’s authority.

God left them at the Tent of Meeting and when His cloud lifted, Miriam was afflicted with leprosy. Since Miriam was stricken but not Aaron, it is probable that Miriam initiated the trouble and Aaron went along. He had been easily swayed before by the Israelites who encouraged him to cast the golden calf. Rather than calling out to God on behalf of his sister, Aaron appealed to Moses for mercy. Moses in turn asked God to heal her. Rather than healing her immediately, God required her to remain outside the camp for seven days in shame.

There are some lessons we can learn from this chapter. Miriam and Aaron had been chosen by God as prophets and Aaron had the additional honor of serving as the high priest. Rather than being satisfied with their positions, they craved more power. Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth dealt with such an attitude. Some of the church members were not satisfied with the spiritual gifts given to them, they wanted to have the more visible gifts. If anyone feels called into a ministry, it is vital to distinguish between God’s call and a personal desire.

People who have a sinful past can still be used by God, however they need to prove themselves before seeking to serve. Although Aaron had stumbled, God still chose him as the high priest but he had only served for perhaps two months before he sought a higher calling. A reconciliation with God and the church is needed before trust can be restored.

We sometimes see leaders and think, I can do that. It’s not nearly as easy as it looks and we often overestimate our abilities. With a great deal of time and effort, I can occasionally prepare a message (usually short) to fill in for Steve who does it about 50 times a year. Moses made his ministry look easy because it was through God that he was able to lead his nation (see John 15:5).