

Tell us what we want to hear

“On no you will not marry a Cushite woman!”, said Miriam and Aaron to their big brother Moses...and the conversation’s ramifications are recorded in Numbers, chapter 12. It’s a great story. But after reading it, one is left wondering why Aaron and Miriam didn’t want their brother Moses to marry a Cushite woman? It’s a good question, to which perhaps there is no clear, Biblical answer. But let’s not worry too much about why, because closer examination of the story makes a much larger point about human nature.

Cush, the name from which “Cushite” comes, was the first son named in the lineage of Noah’s son, Ham. The word itself, Cush, means black. Many believe that the Black race are the descendants of Cush, the descendant of Ham. It’s possible, perhaps probable, but not explicit in Scripture. But there was something about the Cushite woman that made Miriam and Aaron resistant to the idea of their brother Moses being married to her. One can speculate about the reasons, but I submit to you that the reason is secondary at best, to the point of the story. The fact that they resisted Moses, and the *attitude of their hearts* in doing so, were far more significant.

The first verse in the telling of that story says, “*And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married; for he had married a Cushite woman*” (Num 12:1).

That’s all we’ve looked at so far. But it’s the second verse that really tells the story. Look...

“*And they said, Hath Jehovah indeed spoken only with Moses? Hath he not spoken also with us? And Jehovah heard it*” (Num 12:2). Ouch!

Now we know what the problem being discussed in the story is. The problem is Miriam and Aaron saying the Moses is nothing special, for God speaks others as well as to him. In other words, they didn’t have to listen to Moses if he told them something they didn’t want to hear; God speaks to them too.

If they didn’t like what they heard, they’d simply hear from God themselves!

The following verses describe God Himself, coming down in a cloud and rebuking Aaron and Miriam in Moses’ presence, then striking Miriam with leprosy, and Aaron then humbly begging for her restoration. Double Ouch!

The brother and sister wanted to hear from their big brother Moses, only what pleased them; and when it didn’t, Moses’ position, role, anointing and God-given authority, didn’t phase them in the least.

They believed that they could **tell** Moses what they wanted to hear from him, how he should behave, and what he should and shouldn’t do... *whether it was what God told Moses or not.*

In so doing, they actually despised Moses’ anointing; and in so doing, despised the God who had anointed him. Ouch indeed.

Let’s leave Aaron and Miriam alone for a moment and move forward in the history of the Children of Israel, and look at some other scriptural examples of the same attitude of the human heart.

In one really great story, told in both 1Kings and 2Chronicles, King Ahab, King of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, calls upon his counterpart, Jehoshaphat, King of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and tells him that he needs his help in a war to take back some land from Syria.

Jehoshaphat says, *“Sure! But first let’s ask the prophets whether or not God wants us to fight the war, and if so, how we’ll fare.”*

So King Ahab went and gathered 400 prophets together, and asked them for Jehovah’s word on the matter. The 400, supposedly having heard from God, agreed that it was a good idea to go to war, and so Ahab sent word to Jehoshaphat, that “everything was a go”. For some reason, this caused Jehoshaphat, a Godly man, to raise an eyebrow.

So Jehoshaphat said, *“Wait a minute. Isn’t there a prophet of Jehovah that we should ask, besides just those 400 guys”?*

Ahab’s response was remarkable. He told Jehoshaphat, *“there is yet one man by whom we may inquire of Jehovah, Micaiah the son of Imlah: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil” (1Kings 22:8 ASV)*. What!?

So they summoned the prophet, Micaiah. But when he arrived, he got this “briefing” from the other 400 prophets; *“And the messenger that went to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak thou good” (1Kings 22:13 ASV)*

Can you imagine... prophets of the Living God, who are more concerned with what their hearers want to hear, than with what God wants them to say!? Hmm...

OK... let’s cut Ahab some slack. Who ever heard of the prophet Micaiah? No one, right? Why should Ahab listen to him? But Ahab deserves no slack in this. Notice what Ahab had to say about the great prophet Elijah, who was without question, a man of God who spoke for God. Elijah is credited with miracles, revelations of God, victories over false prophets, not to mention the answered prayer of stopping the rain for over three years, and then calling it back again. And as if that’s not enough, he raised a dead boy to back to life!

Earlier in 1Kings, King Ahab had referred to Elijah as the *“troubler of Israel”*, and in one place *“mine enemy”*, merely because Elijah would not tell Ahab what he wanted to hear (*1Kings 18:17, 21:20*)

Well, I guess it was not uncommon among those in the Old Testament, who didn’t have the promise of the Holy Spirit that we have, who lived under the law as opposed to us having the law written upon our hearts, to “want to hear what they want to hear”. But what about believers in the Lord Jesus Christ? What about those claiming Christianity and all that goes with being in the New Covenant? The New Testament is replete with accounts of those who claim to want to hear from God, but when it comes to the point, may not really want to. For example...

The church in the Greek city of Corinth was one such place. The Apostle Paul, who’d spent a good deal of time in the establishing of that Corinthian church, experienced no shortage of those who claimed to want to hear the truth and then fought against it to the point of discrediting Paul himself, the very one from whom they received the message.

Paul had given them the Gospel in person, and then written *more* Gospel truth to them while apart from them; but they didn’t want to hear it. They wanted only to hear what they wanted to hear, and so they attempted to discredit Paul and his letters. *“For his letters,’ they say, ‘are severe and boisterous, but his bodily presence is feeble, and his speech amounts to nothing” (2Cor 10:10 EMTV)*.

In other words, “Bah... we don’t have to listen to him! When he gets here, you’ll clearly see what a little

loser he really is.” Rather than hearing Gospel truth from the one God had sent to bring them the Gospel, they preferred to hear from someone that they liked; someone who would tell them what they wanted to hear; someone they could appreciate with their senses, rather than their souls.

The quintessential New Testament example of this is found in the Apostle Paul’s “swan song”; his second letter to his protégé, Timothy. Many of us are familiar with Paul’s admonition to young Timothy, to, “*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all patience and teaching*” (2Tim 4:2 EMTV).

But what is significant is the “why” of Paul giving this instruction to Timothy. The “why” comes in the very next two verses. “*For there will be a time when they will not put up with sound doctrine, but according to their own lusts, they will heap up for themselves teachers, tickling their ears, and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to myths*” (2Tim 4:3,4 EMTV)

Can it be true? Was/Is there a day coming when people will want their ears tickled?... or as the King James Version says, “*having itching ears*”. What poetic ways of saying, “Tell us what we want to hear!” If there was ever a day, I think we are in it, and we ought to be afraid; very afraid.

Pastor