Miriam and Korah

"Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, **and perished in the gainsaying of Core**."
Jude 1:11

Introduction:
1. This New Testament verse refers to the events of Numbers 16 and Korah's rebellion against Moses.
2. There are other examples as well – see the sermon outline, "I Magnify Mine Office."

MIRIAM AND AARON

The Players (12:1)
A. Miriam was Moses' sister, who followed him at birth, and she was a prophetess (Ex 15:20).
B. Aaron was Moses' brother, who spoke for him to Pharaoh, and the highest priest of Israel.
C. These were the highest spiritual persons in Israel … and Moses' siblings! So what! Read on!

The Crime (12:1)
A. These racists did not like that Moses' had married an Ethiopian woman into the family.
B. How long they stewed over this fact we are not told, but a root of bitterness will defile you.
C. Notice that their words turned against his office, though the issue was personal and family.

The Rebellion (12:2)
A. *Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us?*
B. Since Aaron was the high priest and Miriam a prophetess, God had spoken by them.
C. Using *only* and *also* as they did, they were pursuing equality with Moses as multiple elders.

The Character of Moses (12:3)
A. Moses was the meekest man on the earth. What a testimony of this very accomplished leader!
B. **Meek.** Free from haughtiness and self-will; piously humble and submissive; patient and unresentful under injury and reproach. [OED]
C. What is meekness? Compare Matthew 11:29 and I Peter 3:4 for the Bible cross-references.
D. He had never wanted the job, tried to get out of it, and had begged for Israel's lives often.

The Response of God (12:4-10)
A. Dramatically and quickly, God called for the three siblings to appear before Him at church.
B. He then came down in a cloud and called for Miriam and Aaron to step forward for a lesson.
C. He used "if" to minimize the secondary role of prophets by denigrating visions and dreams.
D. He exalted Moses much higher and declared him faithful in all mine house; see Hebrews 3:2.
E. He exalted Moses much higher by a close relationship to God and clear revelation from God.
F. He recalled the special event of showing Moses the backsides of His glory (Exodus 33:19).
G. He confronted the two rebels for their lack of fear in the words they spoke against Moses.
H. God's anger was inflamed against these two rebels, though spiritual leaders, and He departed.
I. Miriam was left leprous white as snow – a disease that consumes the flesh without a cure.

The Apology of Aaron (12:11-12)

A. Aaron, speaking for Miriam and himself, calls Moses lord and confesses their sin and folly.
B. He compared Miriam, who must have been one beautiful sight, to a decomposed miscarriage.
C. How moved was God by the confession? He was moved enough to mercy – seven days later.

The Prayer of Moses (12:13)

A. This meek man showed his meekness by begging God for immediate healing for the rebel.
B. Moses was moved by his meekness, compassion for Miriam, and hearing Aaron's apology.

The Remedy of God (12:14-16)

A. God did not believe that a quick end was appropriate for the crime of dishonoring Moses.
B. God described her father spitting in her face as inferior to her actual crime by the word "but."
C. Such a reproach of a daughter lasted seven days, and God had reproached her with leprosy.
D. He healed her according to Moses' word at that time by virtue of the single event of spitting.
E. As a lesson for Miriam, God wanted her outside the camp as an outcast to consider her sin.
F. This public punishment on the greatest woman in Israel was a lesson for the whole nation.

Summary

A. Miriam and Aaron were very close to be peers to Moses by family, position, spirituality, etc.; it is a very different thing to consider some nobodies from the camp of Israel saying such.
B. Their disrespectful words were only to make themselves equal to Moses as peers, rather than merely his assistants; they did not reject his authority and claim superiority to him.
C. How many times must you be warned to resolve all offences, concerns, or questions lest they turn into the bitterness that leads to such ridiculous outbursts as we have seen ourselves?
D. Consider the small practical and personal issue that had become a burning sore to them.
E. When a man is in an office that he did not seek, you should be most careful criticizing him.
F. The LORD carefully identified with details and degrees the huge difference between Miriam and Aaron and Moses His man, which justifies our comparisons to teach wisdom.
G. He expected them to have been afraid, though siblings and exalted persons themselves, to speak against Moses in such a way, since by all measures he was clearly their superior.
H. Leprosy is no slap on the wrist: it is a gruesome disease; ask Aaron. God considered it fitting.
I. Though healing the leprosy for Moses' prayer – she needed to suffer public shame for 7 days.

Korah and Company

The Players (16:1-2)

A. Korah was a Levite, a son of Levi by Kohath, not Aaron, thus excluded from the priesthood.
B. Dathan, Abiram, and On were sons of Reuben, Jacob's oldest son, envying Levi's exaltation.
C. These four confederate rebels gathered 250 other princes, men of renown, to their conspiracy.

The Crime (16:3)

A. They gathered themselves together … forming a conspiracy to encourage their wicked hearts in numbers, because sinners are so fearful, they need numbers, like alcohol, to function.
B. They charged Moses and Aaron with taking too much authority to themselves over the congregation without relying on multiple elders to help them.
C. They declared themselves holy as ministers of God able to approach to Him as well as them.
D. They used the populist, political lie that we are all created equal and all the people are holy.
E. They arrogantly declared that Jehovah was among the congregation, not just with the rulers.
F. They challenged Moses and Aaron as to what right they had to personally take authority and preeminence over the church of God and rule it themselves.
G. Is it hard for you to imagine such? I read this past week a young girl writing her pastor about her rebellion, *"But doesn't the Holy Spirit move and work in all of His children, regardless of age and office?"* What hilarious and wicked arrogance, ignorance, presumption, and rebellion.

Moses' First Response (16:4-11)

A. Moses fell on his face, not for obeisance or to beg for Korah and rebels, but to seek wisdom.
B. God's answer through Moses was that the next day would reveal who were His (not election, but ministry) and who is holy (not sanctification, but ministry).
C. The next day would show God's electing choice among men for who His minister truly was.
D. The rules of engagement were for Korah's whole company to take censers, a thing restricted to priests only, which they should have feared from Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-2).
E. He warned the sons of Levi, the cousins of Moses and Aaron, that they presumed too much.
F. They were not thankful to be deacons in the house of God – they presumed to be priests.
G. It is foolish and ungrateful discontentment that causes you to murmur against the LORD.
H. Moses graciously protected Aaron by stepping forward and presuming on his great office!

Dathan and Abiram Show their Character (16:12-14)

A. They defied Moses and would not even show the respect to come at his request.
B. They described Egypt as a land flowing with milk a honey, showing their total delusion and their scornful contempt for Jehovah's description of Canaan.
C. They accused Moses of the whole Exodus out of Egypt and the dangers of the wilderness as a power-grabbing scheme to make himself a prince over the whole nation.
D. You have not done a thing for us, and what will you do for our grievances – put out our eyes?
E. Again they declared their despiteful refusal to answer his request for an audience with them.

Moses' Second Response (16:15-17)

A. Moses was very wroth! Though the meekest man in the earth, it was time to get very angry.
B. Compare this to Solomon promising anything to Bathsheba, and then killing the supplicant.
C. He begged God to reject them from the ministry for their audacity and false accusations.
D. He appealed, entirely appropriately for his character and the situation, to his past conduct.
E. He commanded Korah and the other 253 to join Aaron with censers for the test of calling.

Korah's Action (16:18-19a)

A. They showed up the next morning for the big trial by fire – their fire of their censers.
B. Korah and these princes gathered the whole church/nation together Moses and Aaron.

God's First Response (16:19b-21)

A. Jehovah revealed His glory in the sight of the entire rebellious congregation. Glory!
B. God told Moses and Aaron to quickly step away so He could burn up the whole church.

Moses and Aaron Intercede (16:22)

A. Moses and Aaron begged the church's lives, for they were not equally guilty as the rebels.
B. Moses and Aaron did not beg for the rebel's lives, so distinguish this from that in Num 12.

God's Second Response (16:23-24)

A. God told Moses to warn the nation to get away from Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.
B. The implication was obvious – something drastic was about to happen to these rebels.

Moses Prophesies (16:25-30)

A. Dathan and Abiram would not come, so Moses went to them and told the people to get away.
B. Even touching anything related to them was too close – they would be consumed with them.
C. The people separated themselves; the two rebels stood with their wives and little children.
D. Moses declared his integrity – God called him to the office; he had done nothing of himself.
E. The prophecy – if these men die of natural causes, then God has not sent me to rule Israel.
F. The prophecy – if the LORD buries these bastards alive, I am God's man, and He is angry.

God's Third Response (16:31-35)

A. As soon as Moses finished, God opened the earth beneath these rebels and their families.
B. Dathan and Abiram and On, of the tribe of Reuben, were buried alive with everything theirs.
C. As soon as they had fallen quick (or alive) into the ground, the earth closed upon them.
D. Those in the area fled away, hearing the screams of the damned, in order to save themselves.
E. At the same time God sent fire from His presence to burn alive Korah and the 250 rebels.

God's Fourth Response (16:36-40)

A. God told Moses to take the censers from the burned corpses of the 250 for decorations.
B. The fire in the censers, being holy fire from the altar, was cared for by scattering it yonder.
C. The censers were beaten out and made into a covering for the altar to warn all future rebels.
D. Korah was of Levi, but not of Aaron; the golden plates warned any other than from Aaron.

The Church's Response (16:41-42a)

A. The whole congregation had been spared by Moses' prayer and had seen God's vengeance.
B. But the next day, the people voiced a similar error by describing the rebels as of the LORD.
C. The crime here was not appreciating the wickedness of the rebels and mourning their deaths.
D. Instead of grasping that only God can open the ground – they still blamed Moses and Aaron.
E. The violent deaths of 254 of the brightest and best had not taught them a thing.
F. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron to kill them for the death of their princes.

God's Fifth Response (16:42b-50).

A. The second day in a row the glory of God appeared at the tabernacle to protect Moses. Glory!
B. God told Moses and Aaron again to get away so He could quickly consume them all.
C. Moses and Aaron fell on their faces, but a further lesson needed to be taught to the church.
D. God revealed to Moses that He had sent a plague on the people, so he sent Aaron to deliver.
E. God killed 14,700 of the church that did not get angry enough against the seditious rebels.

Summary

A. A Levite, three from the oldest son's tribe, and princes and men of renown are a far cry from the ignorant, immature, and illiterate that often rise up against pastors.
B. A confederacy and conspiracy of 254 means nothing. The truth is always a very small minority, and these fools should have learned the lesson about numbers from Numbers 14.
C. Some will argue from Revelation 1:6 that we are all kings and priests, forgetting the legal and practical differences, as in such similar places as Galatians 3:28.
G. Is it hard for you to imagine such? I read this past week a young girl writing her pastor, *"But doesn't the Holy Spirit move and work in all of His children, regardless of age and office?"* What hilarious arrogance, ignorance, presumption, and rebellion.
H. Why can't ditch-diggers be content with digging and being members in the house of God?
I. Murmuring against God's minister is murmuring against the LORD God Himself.
J. Anger is right.
K. Begging God's rejection of rebels is right.
L. Detailing conduct toward rebels is right – it is not self-righteousness, but holy pleading.
M. What if the whole church wants to do something wrong – ignore the majority! Go with God!
N. Does buried alive and burned alive get your attention? What does God think of such beasts?
O. The whole church was judged for not getting angry enough to despise the 254 dead rebels.

For Further Study:

1. The sermon, "Ordinance of Authority," … http://www.letgodbetrue.com/sermons/pdf/authority-ordinance-of.pdf.
2. The sermon, "Do We Need Teachers?" … http://www.letgodbetrue.com/sermons/pdf/do-we-need-teachers.pdf.
3. The sermon outline, "Magnify the Office," … http://www.letgodbetrue.com/sermons/pdf/magnify-the-office.pdf.
4. The web document, "Ministerial Handbook," … http://www.letgodbetrue.com/sermons/pdf/rules-for-ministers.pdf.
5. The sermon, "Authority Exalted and Enforced," … not in e-format at this time; preached in 2011.
6. The sermon series, "The Ministry," … not in e-format at this time; preached in 1986.