

# Miriam

“Women Who Dared”



*“And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.” Exodus 15:20-21.*

We don't know much about Miriam, but some people regard her as the First Woman of Israel. Maybe we should study her a little more closely! The Israelite women of that time were allowed to speak to men, travel alone, and go without a veil. We know she was bold and intelligent. But we also know that she was daring as a young woman in helping to save the life of her brother, Moses. Pharaoh had ordered all Hebrew babies to be slaughtered because the Hebrews were getting too powerful. In Hebrews 11:23 we read “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict”

Miriam's mother, Jochebed, placed Moses in a basket made of papyrus and water-proofed. Then she had Miriam put him in the river where the Pharaoh's daughter went to bathe. So our first picture of Miriam is a young Hebrew girl left by the river to guard her baby brother and intercede when the Pharaoh's daughter comes to bathe. When the Pharaoh's daughter saw the baby her heart was moved. Miriam went from her hiding place, and asked the daughter if she wanted a Hebrew mother to nurse the baby. When the Pharaoh's daughter said she did, Miriam went to get her mother who nursed Moses until he was able to be taken to the palace where he was raised. I don't think we often realize that this was three months of waiting for the right opportunity for the baby to be seen by the Pharaoh's daughter. So often we seem to think that Miriam took him down to the river in the water-proof basket and the daughter of the Pharaoh came that day. Further reading tells us it was not that simple!

Time passed. Moses, Aaron, the other brother, and Miriam all grew up. Moses was called by God to lead his people out of slavery with help from Aaron and Miriam, his sister. When Moses led his people across the divided sea Miriam and Aaron were with him. After the Israelites had crossed the sea and the Pharaoh's horses and chariots along with their riders perished in the sea, Miriam took a tambourine, and all the women followed her with tambourines, dancing and singing. She led them in a song that said: “Sing to God what a victory! He pitched horse and rider into the sea!” This was not the same Miriam that went to the bulrushes when her brother was in danger, or was it?

God called Moses, Aaron and Miriam together and God descended in a pillar of cloud and told them that Moses was his servant and that only he could speak intimately with him. He also told them that they needed to respect Moses. Then the cloud was gone.

Jealousy rears its ugly head and Aaron and Miriam ask “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?” Numbers 12:2. The Lord heard them. Aaron and Miriam were ashamed that they had been caught and also upset that they weren't as good as Moses in God's eyes. Miriam had turned leprous and her skin was white. She had to be banished from their camp. Moses prayed to God to forgive her foolish thoughtlessness and to heal her. God did heal her; but he made her be quarantined outside the camp for seven days, so the camp could not journey for seven days.

Miriam was a blessing in many ways, but she was often also an albatross around the neck of Moses. She was strong, but sometimes she seemed to forget that she was not the one in charge! How often do we sometimes forget when things are going well that we are not in charge? We are sometimes just like Miriam.

When she was healed and able to travel again, they continued on their trip to the Promised Land. Miriam traveled with them for approximately forty years; she never entered the Promised Land. But she was a strong woman who believed. She just got a little over zealous at times and God had to remind her of her duty. There was much more to this young woman than just being a nurse maid to her baby brother. She was the nurse maid to the man who, with God's help, would free the Israelites.

Prayer: Dear God, we know that You can hear every word we speak, every thought we have. Help us to rely on Your goodness and not try to take things into our own hands. Help us to pray for guidance and yield to Your knowledge. Amen

1. Miriam's life was one of service and leadership, courage and ingenuity. Are we ever called to use these virtues for our Lord? Can we sometimes become over ambitious?
2. Why did God punish her for speaking against Moses?
3. Does God ever punish us? How?
4. Are we ever jealous of other's achievements?
5. Is it better to err on the side of trying, or sit back, relax and assume that someone else will do God's work?
6. Are you special to God?

© Gail Kennedy Keffer