

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Miriam: The Leading Lady of the Exodus

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-389

We have been doing a series on Sunday night basically called “Unlikely Heroes,” looking at biblical personalities who are used in a mighty way by God unexpectedly. We started out with Enoch early in the book of Genesis, a man who walked with God right into heaven. The man who was a preacher of righteousness as the model, if you will, for Noah, who became the preacher of righteousness for 120 years warning about the coming judgment of God. And then we looked at the life of Joseph, another very unlikely hero because he was sold into slavery and expected to be disintegrating or disassembled into the life of Egypt and lost forever--but God had other plans. All of these biographies, and a few more than I'll be able to cover, are going to come out in a book at the end of the summer called *Twelve Unlikely Heroes*, and you'll want to read them when that book arrives.

Tonight I want you to turn to the opening of the book of Exodus, and these are always very challenging to me. I like to dig down deep in one place, but in order to cover some of these biographical accounts, we have to kind of run fast through greater portions of Scripture. So I'm going to encourage you to stay with us and keep up to speed as we move along in the story of Miriam--Miriam, the leading lady of the Exodus.

You might say, “Well why would you even include her in a list of heroes, unlikely or not? And the answer to that comes from the words of Micah the prophet. Micah the prophet, speaking for God in Micah, chapter 6 and verse 4 said, “For I brought you up from the land of Egypt. I redeemed you from the house of bondage and I sent before you Moses and Aaron and Miriam.” So there God Himself reveals to the prophet Micah that Miriam played a very important role in the Exodus.

Now according to census data, the most common girl's name in the United States has been for a long time the name Mary. In Hispanic world, far and away the most common name is Maria. This has become, Mary or Maria, therefore the most popular name for a girl in the entire Western world. And this is due, of course, to the spiritual legacy of the mother of our Lord--Mary--because of the notable way that she was used by God to give life to the Son of God. More women have been named after her than anyone else, and it's a great name.

But have you ever wondered who Mary was named after? Here's a hint, the Greek rendering of her name is Miriam, or Marian, that is the Greek for Mary. Mary, then, was named for Miriam, although the Greek version has an “a” by the sound and Miriam's name in the Hebrew has an “i.” It is the same name. Mary was named for Miriam because Miriam was deemed to be one of the great women of the

Old Testament, a woman used by God in a marvelous and unique and noteworthy way.

Now just about everybody knows the story of the exodus, Israel's exodus from Egypt, how God miraculously liberated His people from slavery. We all know about Moses and we all know about his brother. We are familiar with their respective roles in the deliverance and the saga. But how much do you really know about their older sister, who is Miriam? And the Bible depicts her as the leading lady of the exodus. And the exodus stands by comment from the writers of Scripture as the most important redemptive event in Old Testament history. It was marked by the establishment of a Passover feast held annually to commemorate that great redemption. That then being the most important redemptive part of Old Testament history, and Miriam being a key figure in it, puts her in the category of an unlikely hero, or heroine.

Three hundred and fifty years is a long time by any measure. And when we come to the opening chapter of Exodus, that is how long the Israelites have been living in the land of Egypt. You remember they went down because of the famine. Their brother Joseph was there. They were provided for; they were welcomed. The Egyptians embraced them. They came down; they multiplied. They were given a very fertile area called Goshen. They lived in that land for 350 years; the first years there were good years. They were welcomed by the Egyptians. Eventually that turned and changed and they were made slaves. You basically know the story.

The book of Genesis ends with an account of the final days of the patriarchs, of Jacob, and his son Joseph. God, you remember, had exalted Joseph to a position of great prominence, and Joseph's family had been found in favor by Pharaoh and they were given a marvelous place. They went from a family of 70 when they arrived in Egypt to a small nation, very rapidly numbering in the hundreds of thousands. And by the time the Exodus comes, there are some that would even number them in the millions.

By the time we come to the narrative of the book of Exodus, however, the attitude of the Egyptians toward the resident Jews has dramatically changed. And in Exodus chapter 1, while you're there, verse 8, here is what introduced the problem. "Now a new king arose in Egypt who didn't know Joseph." Joseph had bought an awful lot of good will because Joseph was a dream-reader, you remember, by the power of God, and Joseph had saved the nation of Egypt by having them prepare for seven years for a seven-year famine. That not only had fed them, but made them wealthy because they had so much food. They had enough for their nation and enough to sell to all the surrounding nations, and Egypt flourished because of Joseph. But there was a new pharaoh now who didn't know Joseph. Whether it was out of complete disregard for the history of Joseph, or out of true ignorance of Joseph, this new monarch could care less about Joseph and therefore he had a completely different view of the family of Joseph.

Now we call them the Israelites. They were growing in numbers, and the way he [Pharaoh] looked at it, they posed a threat to him and to his power. So in verses 9 and 10 he said to the people, “Behold the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come let us deal wisely with them or else they’ll multiply and in the event of war they will also join themselves to those who hate us and fight against us and depart from the land.”

In other words, they’re going to conquer us and then take all our spoil and leave. So Pharaoh decided he had to conspire against them and they find themselves suddenly going from good will to slavery. The Egyptians assigned task-masters over the Israelites, afflicting them corporally and afflicting them with hard labor, making their lives absolutely unbearable and miserable. The Egyptian plan, however, backfired. It didn’t slow down the rapid growth of the Israelites. Verse 12, “The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied. The more they spread out so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel, the harder life became, the more they had babies. And they grew and they grew.”

As another new pharaoh came to power, he was determined to find a more effective solution than his predecessor and he decided that he was going to get very violent with them. So in verse 22, “Pharaoh commanded all his people saying, ‘Every son who was born, just throw them in the Nile...just throw them in the Nile. We don’t fear the women, we just fear the men because they make armies.’”

Now let’s pause at this moment and say that’s the setting. And in that environment of the children of Israel multiplying now as slaves in the land of Goshen, we find a girl named Miriam and a family, a family of Hebrew slaves. This family, along with all the people of Israel, have been suffering this oppressive treatment for many, many years. And then came an act of what we would call stunning cruelty. This, that I read in verse 22, “Now all newborn boys are to be drowned”...all of them. All Jewish boys to be murdered. The descendants of Jacob cry out to God for deliverance. Among those crying out to God is a man by the name of Amram. He is the father of Miriam. And Miriam has a younger brother named Aaron. For Amram, Pharaoh’s new policy of murdering Hebrew babies was very personal, because not only did he have two children, but his wife Jochebed was pregnant with their third child. And if that child was a boy; he was to be killed on the day he was born. Well the child indeed was a boy and they named him Moses.

There’s some interesting elements to the story from Jewish tradition. Jewish tradition indicates that while Moses was still in the womb, Miriam’s father pleaded with the Lord to rescue the Hebrew people from oppression being suffered in Egypt. And according to Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, God answered the prayers and actually appeared to Amram in a dream and promised Amram that his newborn son would grow up to deliver all the Israelites from their bondage. That’s not in the Bible; that’s tradition. Biblical record doesn’t include those details. However, in Hebrews 11 and verse 23 it does highlight the faith that characterized both Amram and Jochebed when it says this, “By faith Moses when he was born was hidden three months by his parents because they saw he was

a beautiful child and they were not afraid of the king's command." Why would they not be afraid of the king's command? Because they had word from the Lord that their son would be spared to become a deliverer. They trusted the Lord. They refused to obey Pharaoh's brutal and merciless decree.

So they managed for a while to keep their son a secret, then determining to hide him as long as they possibly could. And as I just read, Hebrews 11:23 says, "Moses was a beautiful child." That point is also made in chapter 2 of Exodus, verse 2, "The woman conceived, bore a son and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months."

Now that description is more than just physical beauty. Everybody thinks their baby is beautiful, so we're not surprised about that. Sometimes people are wrong, but they can't see that. But it does more than tell us about the physical features of Moses. In Acts 7:20 it says this, "The baby Moses was"...listen..."lovely in the sight of God." What an interesting statement about a baby, a phrase that helps us understand the true nature of his appearance. He was fair in the eyes of the Lord because He had planned for him a very crucial divine destiny. So there was a beauty in this baby not only in his physical form, but a beauty in his purpose that even touched the heart of God.

So three months passed. His parents know they can no longer keep Moses hidden from the Egyptian authorities, so in an amazing act of faith, they entrust Moses to the Lord and they do exactly what Pharaoh's law said, they threw him in the river. However, they made sure that he was in the river in a basket and that that basket was well prepared.

Exodus 2:3 explains what took place. "When his mother could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, that would be a basket woven from the bulrushes that grow along the Nile, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it and laid it in the reeds by the riverbank." By the way, "the ark of bulrushes," that word "ark" is the same Hebrew word used to refer to Noah's ark in Genesis 6 through 9. In fact, it's the only other place in the Old Testament where that word appears. And just as Noah was spared by being placed in an ark, also covered by pitch, Moses was spared by floating in a little tiny ark similarly covered with pitch, waterproof resin.

Pharaoh's edict then was that the newborn Hebrew boy should be thrown into the river--that's exactly what his mother did. Now we know that she picked a spot near the shore that would have been relatively safe for her newborn son, and placed him among the reeds and they grow along the shore, no doubt in a place where his tiny little raft would move along, kind of captive to the reeds, down the river a bit, strategically into a royal bathing area. And that's exactly what happened.

At this point in the Exodus account, our heroine enters the scene--Miriam. She is the daughter of slaves, Amram and Jochebed. And she is certainly an unlikely heroine, yet she plays a vital role in the life of her baby brother at a very crucial time as the story unfolds. We don't know exactly how old she was at the time, but the three months had passed so Moses is at least three months. God now is

going to use her in a crucial way to accomplish His perfect purpose for her brother and for the nation Israel. Imagine what a stretch that would have been for her to even conceive of. This is only the beginning of her amazing story.

Miriam's in the home; she hears the father and mother praying for the safety of this life. She knows that they have heard from the Lord and they're not afraid of Pharaoh because they know God has a plan. And in faith they put the little one in the basket and send him down the river. However, they send her along the shore to keep her eyes on the basket. She has grown in those three months to love her baby brother like any older sister would. She wants to protect him because he is a precious life and because he is her brother and because she may well know what God has in mind, at least in a general sense. It's very likely that she helped her mother weave the basket and cover it and construct it. And now her responsibility is to go down the river and never let the basket out of her sight, hoping for the best.

Judiciously she keeps her distance until the little basket sails into the royal bathing area and there one of Pharaoh's daughters, a princess of Egypt, came down to the river, it says, "to bathe." Exodus chapter 2, verses 5 and 6, she comes to the river. She sees the ark among the reeds. She sent her maid to get it. The maid opens it, which means it had a covering. She saw the child, behold the baby wept so she had compassion on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrew's children." So she immediately recognizes this is a Jewish baby, a Jewish baby boy. And at that moment, she determines that against the edict of her father, she will save that little life. In an ironic turn of events, baby Moses is rescued by the daughter of the man who decrees that he should die. She saves his life. The biblical account doesn't name this princess. Some scholars have suggested perhaps this is Hatshepsut, a common name in Egyptian history, who herself, by the way, eventually became one of the female pharaohs in Egypt and one of the most famous of all the female pharaohs that Egypt had. But whoever she was, God uses this princess to rescue Moses and make it possible for him to get an education in Egypt, to be elevated and trained in all aspects of Egyptian learning and culture and education that would be invaluable for his later role as Israel's deliverer.

Now according to Josephus, the princess called for several Egyptian nursemaids because you've got a three-month-old baby on your hands and this baby has to be nursed. She's trying to find somebody who can nurse this baby and bring comfort to this crying baby--the baby just keeps crying. Providentially God made sure the baby didn't stop crying.

So Miriam now goes into action. She's close by at a safe distance. She closes the gap. She comes up to Pharaoh's daughter, no doubt in a genteel way, and suggests that perhaps this Jewish baby boy would be more attracted to a Jewish mother. And so, in a shrewd and bold action, you see in chapter 2, verse 7, she asks Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?" That's a great idea. The princess agreed. And so Miriam went to find her mother, the mother of Moses. And Jochebed arrived. Verse 9 says in chapter

2, “Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Take this child away and nurse him for me and I’ll give you your wages.’ So the woman took the child and nursed him.” An amazing providence. Moses is now back in the arms of his mother. Miriam demonstrated some courage, didn’t she? And some resolve, and some wisdom, and that led to Moses’ mother being paid to nurse her own son. I don’t know any mothers who are paid to nurse their own children. And to do so without any fear of the Egyptian authorities bothering her because this child now belonged to the Pharaoh’s daughter.

Now listen to this. It is very likely that Moses lived with his birth family until he was nine or ten years old, or maybe even until he was twelve. So his whole formative period of growing was in the home of faithful Jews who loved and trusted the true and living God. In those years when all of his thinking and believing is being formed, it is being formed around the things that are revealed by the true God. He is learning that the history of his family is Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. He is identified with his people Israel, the people that God has called. His character and convictions are built into him, and that’s why in Hebrews 11:24 and 25, when it tells the story about Moses, it says he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. You can attribute all of that to the ten or twelve years that he was under the tutelage and the love and the example and the instruction of his own mother and father.

By the time he had grown and become a young man, he was brought to the princess, chapter 2 and verse 10. “The child grew. She brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter. He became her son. She named him Moses and said, ‘Because I drew him out of the water.’” He is then given a royal education. Acts 7:22 is a sermon in which Stephen rehearses this story, and he says, “He was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.” What would that mean? He had an incredible education not available to the Hebrew slaves. He would have been instructed in Egyptian reading, language, writing, mathematics, and probably multiple other languages of surrounding nations. He would have participated in outdoor sports, which were big with the Egyptians, things like horse riding, archery and all of the skills of the army, the military. God was giving him knowledge and skill to use when he led Israel out of bondage.

So this is the first role that Miriam plays on her way to being a remarkable person in the economy and the purpose of God. She was prepared by God for the moment along the river when she could be given that little brother and take him back to be raised by his own parents. He would then be raised in such a way that his convictions and his commitments were Hebrew and not Egyptian. He was very much like Daniel. Daniel, a young man raised around the things of the true God, cannot be bought by all the philosophy and the power and the wealth of Babylon, and nor could Moses by all that the Egyptians offered him.

So during those years she shared family life with two brothers. Baby brother grew into a young boy. Her other brother, Aaron, was three years older than Moses. And together the three children were taught about God and taught the Law of God, and taught their family history. And together all three of them would one day be used by God in the greatest redemptive event of the Old Testament--Israel’s

exodus from Egypt.

“Now when the day came for Moses to leave for the palace,” I’m sure Miriam was there to say good-bye. She had watched Moses float away when he was a baby and her heart must have been aching at that moment. And here she continues to observe him from a distance in adulthood as he becomes the adopted prince of Egypt. She watched and she wondered and she waited. When would God fulfill the promise to make a deliverer out of this man?

Now we would all like to know more about what it was like to be Moses in Egypt, wouldn’t we? But the Bible doesn’t tell us that. It doesn’t tell us really anything about what was going on during his days as an Egyptian prince. It simply says that his education had a great effect because Stephen says of him, Acts 7:22, “He was mighty in words and deeds.” He was mighty in words and deeds. But even with all of that Egyptian training, he never forgot where he came from, and according to Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, Moses continued to identify with the Hebrew people to the point that there were Egyptians in high places who were constantly suspicious of him and even looked for opportunities to kill him.

So if we can trust Josephus--and normally we can--to pass down an accurate tradition, he was not popular with everybody because of his bent toward the Hebrews. This played out to be a reality on one occasion after Egypt was attacked by the neighboring Ethiopians. Pharaoh made Moses a general in his army because of what we just said--he was mighty in words and he was mighty in deeds. That ought to do it for a general, right? You can fight on your own and you can motivate the troops. So he became a general in the Egyptian army and he sent him off to fight the invading Ethiopians.

Again we go to Josephus and the story is fascinating. Pharaoh saw this as a win-win move. If Moses succeeded, the Ethiopians would be driven out of the land and they would be vanquished. If Moses failed, then he would get killed. And so it was a win-win. The threat of Moses would be eliminated if he lost the battle, and Egypt would be better off if he won it.

Well once again the Egyptian plan didn’t have its desired effect due to some brilliant strategizing, according to Josephus, by the young general. Moses’ military campaign was a smashing success, so much so that he didn’t just defeat the Ethiopians, he vanquished them. And when he returned home, he was more popular than ever. And the Egyptians were more afraid of him than they had ever been. The biblical narrative then picks up the story of Moses when he’s 40-years-old, and by now he is a well-known, powerful, erudite general who has triumphed greatly. He is popular with the people and he is feared by all competitors.

We read in Exodus, chapter 2, starting at verse 11, “It came about in those days when Moses had grown up, he went out to his brethren and looking on their hard labors he saw an Egyptian beating a

Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that. And when he saw there was no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." Killed him and buried him. "He went out the next day and behold, two Hebrews were fighting with each other and he said to the offender, 'Why are you striking your companion?' But he said, 'Who made you a prince, or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?' Then Moses was afraid and said, 'Surely the matter has become known.'" He thought he got away; he looked this way, looked that way, killed the Egyptian, buried him in the ground. But obviously someone saw it because here are two Hebrew slaves saying, "Are you going to do to us what you did to the Egyptian?"

If you go back to the sermon of Stephen in Acts 7:25, the motivation behind Moses' action. It wasn't reckless motivation. He was eager to deliver Israel. And here's what Acts 7:25 says: "He supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by His hand, but they did not understand." In fact, these two Hebrews who are fighting saying, "Are you going to kill us, too?"--they don't get it. But that was an illustration of the power that Moses would have to be their deliverer.

Well, clearly, it wasn't yet God's time. The people didn't understand it. And Moses' act of violence, premature before God, had really commissioned him to the work of delivering Israel. Killing this Egyptian, it cannot be condoned, it cannot be affirmed; it wasn't a righteous act. It does tell us the profound zeal that he had with his people and his total rejection of everything that Egypt had to offer.

Well the word gets to Pharaoh. And you know the story. And now Pharaoh wants to kill Moses. They were already suspicious of him. The people in power were threatened by him and time is running out. So what does Moses do? He's age 40. What does he do? He flees--and he fled to a place called Midian and he spent the next forty years in Midian. His life is easy to break down: 40 years in Egypt, 40 years in Midian, 40 years in the wilderness.

And what is he doing? He's taking care of sheep. He's a shepherd, the lowliest task imagined. He goes from being a prince in Egypt, a nobleman, a general in the army, an educated man at the very top to being a humble shepherd. This is necessary to shape him into the man God wants him to be. Now if you think God can make you the man that you need to be in a few months, maybe you ought to read this story and think about it--40 years?

Through all of this now, Miriam is waiting--40 years since she sent him down the river in the basket, 40 years. And now he goes off; he's 40 years old when he leaves Egypt, and he spends 40 years in Midian. He finally returns and you can go over the seventh chapter of Exodus. He comes back from Midian in Exodus 7. He is now 80 years old, and she is older than he is. She's been waiting for 80 years.

In the meantime, she got married. She married a man named Hur, H-u-r, who was a descendant of Judah, and they had a family. They had a family. And she was instilling in her children all the things

that her parents had instilled in her. Eight long decades she has been waiting. She had always believed that Moses was to be God's chosen deliverer; she just didn't know when the deliverance was going to come. And when Pharaoh banished Moses, she thought maybe it would never come. But the pharaoh that banished Moses died (and he died back in chapter 2) and her hope must have ascended. But then all those decades went by.

Her heart must have raced in the fourth chapter of Exodus, twenty-seventh verse, when Aaron told her that God had told him to go and meet Moses in the wilderness. Finally...finally after 40 years in the wilderness, God says to Aaron, "Go meet Moses, the time has come." And how her excitement must have grown when Moses came back. And I'm going to crunch the story very rapidly.

Moses comes back, confronts Pharaoh and God sends plagues--frogs, lice, flies, boils, hail, locusts--afflicting the Egyptians, and Moses keeps saying, "Let my people go." "Let my people go." And while all of this is going on, all these horrible, deadly plagues are going on, remember the Hebrews are out in Goshen and they're protected by God. And they begin to realize, "God has heard our cries," chapter 3, verse 7. "We're here and we're protected and redemption is near."

And then the last plague was the death of the firstborn. In chapter 12 the angel of death was going to come across Egypt and slay the firstborn animals and humans, and if they wanted to be protected, if the Israelites wanted to be protected, they needed to slay a lamb. The Passover is instituted, the Passover Lamb. The angel of death passes over and the instruction is given in Exodus, chapter 12, and Miriam and her family would have participated in the first Passover. They would have killed a lamb. Miriam and her family would have put the blood on the doorpost and the crosspiece. They would have eaten the meat. They would have prepared the unleavened bread and gotten everything packed for a hasty exit out of Egypt. The angel of death passed by that night, and the next morning it's time to leave. They've been in Egypt 430 years--430 years according to Exodus 12:41--and at last it's time to go. They're being set free.

You remember the story, don't you? Moses leads the people and they leave, and a couple of days later Pharaoh changes his mind, remember? Exodus 14, "The heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people and they said, 'Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?' So the hard-hearted Pharaoh changes his mind, summons his army, gives chase, and they chase them. And we read in Exodus 12:37 there were six hundred thousand men plus women, and there would be at least six hundred thousand women and that would make one million two, and then all the children. That's why we say it's a couple of million people. They are moving. But, believe me, with that entourage, they're moving methodically and slowly. They're being directed, according to Exodus 13, by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. But the army catches them and Josephus reports that in addition to the six hundred select chariots mentioned in Exodus 14, Pharaoh's army consists of fifty-thousand horsemen and two hundred thousand foot soldiers--massive army.

The people are now against the Red Sea and they begin to panic because Pharaoh with his massive force is breathing down on them. So they complain to Moses and according to Exodus 14:11 and 12, they say, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us to die in the wilderness? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness." Well, I mean, that makes sense, rather be a slave in Egypt than be a corpse in the desert. It looked grim. They were unarmed, untrained, not ready for a battle. Coming at them was the most advanced, the most efficient army in the ancient world, hundreds of chariots, thousands of cavalry, hundreds of thousands of infantry, they're trapped against the Red Sea with nowhere to flee. The situation is totally hopeless, and they're in hysterics.

It is at that moment that Moses knows better. He says, "Do not be afraid, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today for the Egyptians whom you see today, you will see again no more forever." Wow! "The Lord will fight for you and you shall hold your peace." Stop your complaining and watch what God will do.

And what happened next is one of the Sunday school classics, right? We're all familiar with it. The Red Sea opens up; they go through on dry land--incredible miracle. To just think about the science of it is staggering. To take an entire sea and wall it up and create a dry land path through the middle of it, beyond imagination. But God works well with H₂O, he really does. He worked well with it at creation because at one point there was the water below and the water above. He worked well with it in the Flood, and He handled it well here, as well. What acts that took place is mind-boggling, to split an ocean into two parts with a dry road going through--vast walls of water, hundreds of feet high on either side, and miles across from shore to shore. And the whole several million Israelites with all their stuff and their children goes through on dry land. Astonishing.

The Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind, all that night. Made the sea into dry land and the waters were divided so the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right side and on their left. The Lord had turned His people's fear into triumph.

Well they reached the other side and they went across and stood on the other shore. The Lord lifted the cloud that had come down to sort of hide them from Pharaoh's army. And the Egyptians now realized that they had escaped. I think that maybe all those deadly plagues should have had some educational effect on the Egyptians, that when you're dealing with these people and you're dealing with their God, it could be very dangerous. Stupidly the generals of that army made one of the most disastrous if not *the* most disastrous military decision ever made, to follow them into the water, "Let us flee, let us flee," they finally said once they got into the middle and they began to realize where they were and what was happening. They became confused, the Scripture says. They couldn't navigate their chariots. The animals were hysterical. They realized their mistake. They said this, "The Lord

fighters for them. The Lord fights for them.” Trapped in a valley between mountains of water, their dilemma was taken further because, according to Psalm 77, there was a sudden and severe thunderstorm. By this time all the Israelites had ended up on the other shore. God said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand,” and with that the walls of water crashed with a violence never occurring in the world. In one catastrophic holocaust the massive army of Egypt was like a bunch of drowned rats.

Exodus 14:28, “The waters returned. Covered the chariots, the horsemen and all the armor of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them, not so much as one of them remained.” The Lord had rescued His people. Exodus 14:31 says, “Because they feared the Lord and believed in Him,” because Moses led them to do that. They saw that the Lord would fight for them.

What happened in response is found in the fifteenth chapter of Exodus; it was a song. They began to sing a beautiful hymn of praise. And I won’t read it to you but you need to read it, 15:1 to 18, it’s called The Song of Moses.” Moses and the sons of Israel sang to the Lord this song. It extols the power of God, the glory of God, the supremacy of God. “Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You? Glorious and holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders.” And it wraps up in verse 18 with a statement, “The Lord shall reign forever and ever.”

It is in the midst of this jubilant praise that Miriam again appears, Miriam. She’s still around and she appears again. She leads the women in a song, starting in chapter 15, verse 20, Miriam the prophetess, the one whom God used to speak, Aaron’s sister. Took the timbrel in her hand, all the women went after her with timbrels and with dancing. “And Miriam answered them, ‘Sing to the Lord for He is highly exalted. The horse and his rider He has hurled into the seas.’” This is Miriam, recognized by all the women as a leader and she leads them in praise. She is called a prophetess because through her God revealed messages for His people. She is the first woman in the Bible to be given that privilege, the first woman in the Bible to be given that rare privilege of receiving and disseminating a word from the Lord. There are only three other women in the Old Testament that the Lord used in this way, Deborah, Huldah, and the wife of Isaiah.

Second, her mention in Exodus 15 over any other person suggests that she played a strategic role along with Moses and Aaron in the events of the exodus. And that takes us to Micah 6:4, which I read, “I brought you up from the land of Egypt. I redeemed you from the house of bondage and I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam.” She played a very important role as a praise leader among the women and even was used by God to convey His Word. Her leadership particularly with the women of Israel is unique.

This also gives us a glimpse into her heart, her soul. She worshiped the Lord with heartfelt emotion. Her song, as brief as it is, as simple as it is, centers on the Lord being highly exalted. She worships in word and melody with instruments, and even with physical movements she leads others in exuberant thanksgiving--a precedent, by the way, established by her for later generations of Jewish women. You

can see that in 1 Samuel 18. So after 80 years finally she is exuberant; she lets out all her joy that had been waiting for 80 years for the deliverance promised through her brother Moses.

Epoch experience at the Red Sea, carved into the minds of the Israelites. Could you forget that if you were there? Could you lose sight of that? Could that diminish? I don't think so. And yet they wander into the desert over to Mount Sinai. They have just seen the power of God in unparalleled ways through all the plagues and through the Red Sea experience. They arrive at a place called Marah and they grumble because they don't like the taste of the water. So what does God do in chapter 15? Changes the water. They come to another place called the Wilderness of Sin and they complain there because they have no food. So what does God do? Exodus 16, gives them manna and quail. They come to another place called Rephidim, again there's no water and they get angry. "Where's the water?" And Moses strikes the rock with his staff and God again pours out water (Exodus 17). Despite their constant complaining and anger at God, God continues to preserve and protect His people. The Amalekites attack them and God gives them an amazing victory, an absolute, amazing victory. And it involves Aaron and Hur, the husband of Miriam. So Moses is being supported by his brother-in-law.

And by the way, all that I've just said to you takes place in the first two months of their journeying in the wilderness--first two months. Well, you know the rest of the story. They never got out of the wilderness--never got out of it. That generation died in the wilderness because of their constant lack of faith and complaint and because they made a golden calf and worshiped that golden calf and dishonored God.

As a footnote, God selected a craftsman for the temple who is related to her husband. Bezalel is the grandson of Hur and Miriam--Bezalel. And if you read Exodus 35, you find that this is the man who is the supreme craftsman for the tabernacle, the tabernacle. The Lord blessed Miriam with such an illustrious husband that stood by Moses; an illustrious grandson who helped construct the tabernacle. God kept pouring blessing on Miriam.

I wish the story always was like that. But as it comes to a conclusion, there's a sad experience. Miriam turns on her brother Moses. She challenges Moses' authority. This is ugly. Numbers chapter 12 gives us an account of it. She is disloyal and the Lord reacts. Listen to what Numbers 12:6 to 8 says: "Hear now My words, if there's a prophet among you, I the Lord make Myself known to him in a vision. I speak to him in a dream, not so with My servant Moses, he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face-to-face, even plainly and not in dark sayings. And he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?"

You know who God said that to? Moses, Aaron and Miriam; He gathered the three of them and He said, "How dare you speak against My servant Moses. And the Lord departed." And listen to this, "And Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Aaron turned toward Miriam and there she was, a

leper.” In that moment Aaron acknowledged their sin, begged Moses to intercede on his sister’s behalf. Miriam must have joined in that penitence. It is very likely that she and Aaron instigated the attack on Moses to start with because she alone is given leprosy. We could even say she led the attack and not Aaron, although he was complicit. And Moses interceded for his sister. Again in Numbers 12--he prayed for her, and the Lord mercifully touched her and healed her.

We don’t learn anything more about her after that, until her death. Why did she challenge her brother? I don’t know; we really don’t know. Was it hard for her as the older sister to always have to submit to his leadership? Did she think that he was making some choices that were not the best? We don’t know. We have no idea. We don’t hear anything more about her. But we do have Jewish tradition that tells us a little bit.

Her death didn’t come until the first month of the fortieth year of wilderness wandering. So she’s 120 and Numbers chapter 20 gives this brief account, “Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month; the people stayed at Kadesh and Miriam died there and was buried there.” That’s all that it says.

Thankfully we have Josephus again. Josephus says that the people celebrated her death with a public funeral, followed by 30 straight days of mourning. Miriam died in the first month of that year. Aaron died in the fifth month of that year. And Moses died in the eleventh month of that year. And with the death of these three, first generation passed away. And that sinful generation never entered the Promised Land. A new generation had been born in the wilderness. They were led in by Joshua.

Finally then, what is the legacy of this amazing woman? She was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. She died outside and was buried outside. She is one of three siblings who play an important, instrumental, vital role in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. She as a young slave girl watched over her baby brother as a wife and mother waited for deliverance to come. As an elderly woman, probably in her nineties, she saw the power of God at the Red Sea and led the women in joyful celebration and praise. God used her husband Hur to secure Israel’s victory over the Amalekites and used her grandson Bezalel to help construct the tabernacle. And though she sinfully challenged Moses’ authority in the wilderness and was severely struck with leprosy, she lived out the last years of her life, four decades, submissively supporting Moses’ authority.

For a full month, her death was mourned, as they mourned the death of Aaron and the death of Moses. It’s little wonder then that Micah identifies her along with Moses and Aaron as important in the work of God in the Exodus. When you come to the New Testament, there are many different women who are named after her: Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Mary the mother of John Mark, and in Romans 16:6, a lady named Mary of Rome.

In final comment, there are some parallels between Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Miriam, the sister of Moses. Not to overstate them, but just listen. Both women were connected to great deliverers, both Mary the mother of our Lord and Miriam. Miriam connected to Moses, the foremost human deliverer of the Old Testament, and Mary connected to Jesus, the Messiah Himself. Both women watched over these deliverers when as infants their lives were endangered by wicked kings. Both women sang songs of praise to God in response to His deliverance--Miriam in Exodus 15 and Mary in Luke 1. Both women were used by God in the unfolding of His plan of redemption. Miriam was privileged to look after her baby brother, the one whom God used to redeem Israel, and Mary was blessed to give birth to a baby boy, the one who would redeem the world. Miriam is rightly regarded as a hero, not because of her own greatness, but because she rested in faith for years and years and years, and her faith was rewarded, and her hope was realized. And she sang her songs--sing to the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously. That's the story of Miriam.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, sweeping across these amazing accounts is such a joy, and though there's an awful lot of material to absorb, we're so thankful that You've laid it all out for us. How enriched we are to have this divine revelation, this consistent, inerrant revelation where we can go from Exodus to Micah, to Hebrews, to the book of Acts, and everything fits together perfectly--though written at different times and by different human instruments, one author, the living Holy Spirit. May we be so trusting as Miriam to believe Your Word, to endure faithfully until it comes to pass. We give You honor and praise for this story, reminding us that sometimes our faith has to carry for a long time to see its promised fulfillment. Give us that patient endurance that marks true faith until we see Your hand revealed. We think of that even in the world in which we live when we long that our Deliverer would come and make things right and rescue us from the bondage that still exists for all who live in this world in the flesh. May we be patient until His coming, or until we see Him face-to-face. We pray in His name. Amen.

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