

A Walk with Miriam

the exodus from slavery to the promised land



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	2
WEEK ONE: DESPERATE TIMES AND DESPERATE MEASURES	3
WEEK TWO: PLAGUES AND PASSOVER	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
WEEK THREE: A NATION IS BORN	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
WEEK FOUR: PROBLEMS IN THE WILDERNESS	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
WEEK FIVE: AT THE MOUNTAIN.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
WEEK SIX: WORSHIP GOD ALMIGHTY.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
WEEK SEVEN: THE LAW AND THE PRIESTHOOD.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
WEEK EIGHT: LAW AND ORDER	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
WEEK NINE: MIRIAM’S REBELLION	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
WEEK TEN: A CHANCE TO BELIEVE	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
WEEK ELEVEN: QUARRELLING WITH MOSES.....	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
WEEK TWELVE: MIRIAM’S LIFE	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
AT JOURNEY’S END	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
BIBLIOGRAPHY	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

INTRODUCTION

I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. (Micah 6:4)

When God redeemed His people from slavery in Egypt, He did more than simply free them from their earthly chains. He set them on a journey that would change them forever, one where they would meet Him and see His mighty works first hand. He also gently led them through many trials and tests – some of their own making – towards the place He had prepared for them: the Promised Land.

The Exodus story is perhaps one of the most beloved stories in the Old Testament. Its drama and spectacle captures the imaginations of children and adults alike. It also contains the central theme of the Old Testament – God’s Law given through Moses. This covenant relationship lies at the very foundations of the Christian faith today, for without it, we have no knowledge of our need for a Savior. On the basis of fulfilling this Law, Jesus Christ became a man and offered Himself as an atoning sacrifice on our behalf. We are well served to know what the Old Testament has to say about the Law and the God who gave it.

Beyond that, every page of Scripture, both Old and New Testament, points to Jesus Christ and mankind’s need for Him. We see Him in the power of the plagues, the beauty of the Tabernacle, the intricacies of the Law and the intimacy of His relationship with Moses. The Exodus story is filled with images of Christ waiting for us to take time to see them.

This study is designed to take us on an exodus of our own as we walk through the pages of Scripture side-by-side with Moses’ sister, Miriam. Just as God gives us leaders today to guide us our spiritual journeys, so God gave Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to His children to lead them on their literal journey from slavery to the Promised Land. Miriam is an intriguing figure in Scripture, and the first woman in Scripture to be named a prophetess. As such, she knew and spoke the Word of the Lord to her people during their forty years in the wilderness, working alongside her brothers.

This study takes some liberty with Miriam in imagining what life might have been like for her during the long journey. While based in Scripture, these segments are fictional and should not be taken as fact. I have found, however, that much can be revealed when we insert ourselves into the stories of the Bible – smelling the same smells, hearing the sounds, imagining the sand beneath our feet. Rather than approaching the exodus story as some distant history, this study encourages you to place yourself inside the story and learn it from the inside out.

Each week’s lesson is broken into five days of work. I encourage you to take one day at a time and be consistent with your study of the Word each week. Some weeks cover several chapters from a high level view – try to read each week’s passage all the way through at one sitting at least once during the week to get a feel for the flow of the text. That may get cumbersome in portions of Leviticus in particular, but there is great value in reading every word of God chosen for our benefit.

So, put on your walking shoes and strap on your Bible – let’s begin!

WEEK ONE: DESPERATE TIMES AND DESPERATE MEASURES

“Miriam!”

Atop a small hill near the green plains of Goshen, the seven-year old girl startled at the sound of her name. She meant to sit down for only a minute and rest her weary legs after carrying water all morning. But she must have drifted off to sleep – her eyes were foggy and her head felt a little light. She barely slept the night before, her mind racing with strange images and dreams. Even now, the scene lingered before her eyes - an old man with a large shepherd’s staff. He led a huge crowd towards a cloud covered mountain looming in the distance. She didn’t know who he was or what he was doing, but she felt like he was very important. She wondered....

“Miriam! Where are you?!” her mother’s frantic voice cried out.

“I’m coming, Momma!” she called as she clambered to her feet and picked up her large clay pot. Her trudging walk became a run when she spotted her mother doubling over in pain. Her three-year-old brother, Aaron, toddled out from behind the front door curtain to see what all the commotion was about.

“Get the midwife,” her mother gasped. “It’s time.” Miriam nodded, dropped and nearly broke her water pot before dashing out into the village. Panic gave way to excitement as she found Shiphrah working her loom in the mid-day breeze.

“Come quick!” Miriam breathed, her dark hair nearly covering her sweaty face. “Momma’s having the baby!” The midwife quickly gathered her weaving tools, tossed them inside her door, grabbed a small stool, and hustled off with Miriam prattling and pulling at her all the way. When they arrived at the house, her mother was inside lying down on a grass mat covered with a worn out wool blanket, her breathing shallow and quick.

“There, there now, Jochebed,” Shiphrah tsked, kneeling and taking the pregnant woman’s hand. “We’ve done this before so we can just take it easy.” She arranged blankets and cloths set aside for this purpose, clucking in soothing tones as she made her preparations. Miriam quietly took her little brother’s hand and led him outside.

Miriam hovered near the doorway, trying to keep Aaron occupied and happy, but she was intensely curious to know what was going on inside. She winced at the cries and groans of her mother, her anxiety growing with the length of the shadows as the day drew on. As the sun began to set, she spotted a familiar shape on the street, shoulders hunched, face dirty with mud, straw still clinging to his worn sandals.

“Abba!”¹ Miriam cried out and rushed into his arms. “Abba! Abba!” Aaron mimicked, jumping up and down and nearly knocking himself over. The big man gathered his daughter into his arms and kissed her on the forehead.

“What are you two doing out here? Shouldn’t you be helping your mother with supper?” he asked.

¹ Hebrew word for “Daddy” or “Papa”

"The baby's coming!" Miriam exclaimed. "Shiphrah has been here for hours." Her father's eyes widened and looked to the door of his home as another cry came piercing through the covering. The cry was followed by a gasping, coughing noise...and the wail of a newborn drifted out on the evening air. Miriam's father set her down and hastened towards the doorway.

"Jochebed! I'm here!" he called through the curtain. A moment later the midwife emerged, a small bundle cradled in her arms. She whispered something to Miriam's father that seemed to please and worry him at the same time. He anxiously looked around and then the two adults disappeared back inside. Miriam gathered up her brother and cautiously moved towards the door. Uncertain as to whether she should go in or not, she listened intently to the whispering inside, trying to catch some news. Was everything alright? Was her mother okay?

Shiphrah burst out, her birthing stool tucked under her arm. "You can go in now, dear," she said to Miriam. "I'll be back in a bit with some dinner." And away she scurried into the fading light. Miriam slowly pulled back the door curtain, Aaron in tow behind her. There on the bed her mother lay exhausted and sweaty, cooing at the tiny baby in her arms. Spotting Miriam, she smiled and beckoned her over. Miriam approached slowly and peered into a tiny face.

"Your baby brother is here," Jochebed whispered. Miriam held her breath. He was the most beautiful baby she had ever seen! Not wrinkly, purple and misshapen like other newborns, but pink and flush and....perfect. "A brother," she whispered as she stared.

"We have to keep this quiet," Miriam's father said. "If the soldiers find out...."

"Hush!" Jochebed scolded. "I know, I know..." and she sighed deeply. The tiny bundle grunted and nuzzled, wiggling just a bit in his mother's arms. She sat up and prepared to nurse her newest son. Miriam sat down beside her, not wanting to be any further away from her beautiful brother than she had to be. Yes, he must be kept secret. She had seen the soldiers go into other Hebrew homes and come out with swaddled bundles, leaving screaming mothers and teary-eyed fathers behind them. Baby Hebrew boys were not safe in Egypt.

"Baby, baby! I wanna see!" Aaron tugged at Miriam's tunic. She pulled him up to her lap, hoping that he would be satisfied by a quick look and then return to his playing. He oohed and aahed over the little one nursing and then wiggled to the dirt floor of the hut. "I hungry!" he complained. Miriam nodded and rose to find a piece of fruit for him to nibble on until the midwife returned with the promised meal. Her father gently kissed her mother on the head, wearily sinking into the mat beside her.

Miriam handed a small piece of mango to her brother and patted him on the head as he gobbled on it greedily. Looking at her weary parents, a knot began to grow in her stomach. Her father's eyes met hers, and she knew they were thinking the same thing.

How long would they be able to hide him?

DAY ONE: READING AND RESPONDING

Read Exodus 1:1 – 4:26. Take a few moments and pray that the Holy Spirit would show you something personal from the text.

- 1. What are the major events that occur in this passage?**
- 2. What one event impresses you the most? Why?**
- 3. If you had been involved in this part of the story, would you have done anything differently? If so, what and why?**
- 4. Think for just a few moments about the event you chose. What truth or principle does it teach you?**

DAY TWO: A CLOSER LOOK – RESCUED FROM THE RIVER

Read Exodus 1:15 – 2:10

- 1. Miriam’s family successfully hid the newborn baby boy for three months. What drove his mother, Jochebed, to take the risk of putting her baby into a basket in the Nile River?**
- 2. At the time of Moses’ birth, Miriam is estimated to be somewhere between seven and eleven years old. What do you think of Miriam’s part in the story? How would you describe her actions?**

I can hardly imagine being so desperate to save my child as to risk putting him in a river, quite possibly never seeing him again. This river had been a place of death for so many Hebrew boys – yet Jochebed brought him here hoping that he would have life. Some historians believe Jochebed and Miriam put Moses into the water just upstream from where they knew the Egyptian princess came to bathe, but there was no way to know whether the princess would accept the baby or hand him over to be killed. The anguish of this mother’s heart would have been unbearable.

Yet God provided graciously for Moses, for Jochebed and the rest of her family as well. Not only was Moses’ life saved, but the baby boy was given back to her for a time along with payment for nursing him. What grace and mercy there was for this desperate mother! What tender care in the arrangements that were made for baby Moses after he was plucked from the river by the Egyptian princess!

3. List all of the ways that God provided for Jochebed in what could have been a disastrous situation.

4. Take a look at each of the girls/women who played a part in Moses’ survival. Write down what we know about each one in the chart below:

Name	Her part in saving Moses	Why did she do it?
Shiphrah/Puah		
Miriam		
Jochebed		
Egyptian Princess		

What, if anything, do these women have in common?

Let’s go back and take a closer look at the basket that Jochebed prepared for her baby before she entrusted him to the Nile River. The basket was made of papyrus, a strong and light-weight reed that was commonly used to make small river vessels. By coating the inside and outside of the basket with tar and pitch, Miriam’s mother made the basket water tight.

The basket of Moses is an Old Testament picture of the salvation offered to us through Jesus Christ – a **typology** of Jesus. The papyrus that was used to make the basket was also used to make paper, so it is reminiscent of words, or perhaps the Word of God (John 1:1). It was completely sealed by pitch inside and out to be water tight; in a similar way, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit as believers and our salvation is safe (1 John 5:18) and secure (Ephesians 1:13). Moses was placed into the basket and delivered from certain death, rescued by royalty, and given a new life and a new identity. We, too, are delivered from death that is the wage of sin (Romans 6:23), adopted by royalty (Ephesians 1:5) and given a new life (Romans 6:4).

5. In each of the verses below, circle the phrase that reminds you of the basket that Moses' mother made for him.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.... (Colossians 1:13)

For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life. (Psalm 56:13)

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

6. What did the baby boy do to save himself? What can we do to save ourselves from the dominion of darkness and sin?

7. How was Moses' life different from what it could have been if his mother hadn't put in him into the river to be adopted by the Egyptian princess? Contrast what could have been for Moses and what actually happened in the first years of his life.

Moses was saved FROM:

Moses was saved TO:

Slavery

Luxury and privilege

DAY THREE: A MILE IN HER SHOES

Following Moses' birth and rescue, we know very little about Miriam's life for many years. Jewish tradition and some early translations of the Old Testament claim that Miriam married Caleb and was the mother of Hur², who we will learn more about later in our study. She would have lived as a slave among her fellow Hebrews, and probably often wondered what became of her baby brother now living in Pharaoh's palace.

While Moses lived a life of privilege as the adopted son of an Egyptian princess, his fellow Hebrews were subject to harsh and cruel labor. Exodus 2:23-25 describes the Hebrews groaning in their slavery and crying out to God for help. Later passages describe them being forced to dig river channels, build walls, and make bricks for the Egyptians' many elaborate structures. It would have been hard, dirty, and back-breaking work in the hot sun.

When Moses, enraged by the harsh treatment of the Hebrews, killed an Egyptian slave master and fled into the desert, he was about 40 years old, so Miriam would have been at least 47. The events surrounding Moses' escape to Midian would probably have caused quite a stir in Egypt. Imagine yourself as Miriam hearing that Moses was now a fugitive from Pharaoh and no longer in the country.

- 1. What do you think Miriam's hopes were regarding her youngest brother? Do you think she had any idea of what God's plans for Moses might be?**

- 2. What do you think Miriam thought and felt when she heard the news that Moses was gone?**

- 3. Describe a time when you felt like everything was going wrong or that all hope was gone. What was that like?**

² According to the Targum, an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible dating back to the time of the Second Temple, "Ephrath" in 1 Chronicles 2:19 is another name for Miriam. She is named as Caleb's second wife (following the death of his first wife) and the mother of Caleb's son, Hur. However, the historian Josephus claims that Miriam was the wife of Hur and therefore the daughter-in-law of Caleb. In either case, she would have been an important member of that family.

4. In each of the verses below, list the reason that we can have hope, even when it seems there is no reason for hope:

Verse	We have hope because...
Psalm 9:18	
Psalm 37:39-40	
Romans 5:1-5	
Hebrews 10:23	

The Hebrew people knew that they were a people of promise. God had promised their father Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (later re-named Israel) that they would have a land of their own and be a great nation. Yet, at this point, they appeared to be as far from receiving that promise as anyone could be! They were slaves in a land not their own and harshly treated. Their baby boys were being taken from them and killed. At least four generations of Hebrews were born into slavery and died in slavery. There is no record of God speaking to His people during this time – it appears that He remained silent while His people suffered.

5. Imagine that you are a Hebrew slave in Egypt during this time. What would you think of God?

Many people throughout history have reached a point of desperation and wondering if God has forgotten them. Even King David felt this way, as we read in Psalm 42: "I say to God my Rock, 'Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?' My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'"

6. Can you think of a time when you felt oppressed, like God had forgotten you? What was it like?

7. What does Psalm 42 say we should do, even in the most troubling times? Why do you think this is important for us to remember?

DAY FOUR: A CLOSER LOOK – MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH

Miriam could not have imagined what was taking place in Moses' life as he lived in the wilderness. As the months dragged on into years, there was no way for Miriam to know if her youngest brother had even survived. Surely, holding on to hope would have been difficult. But while her days of slavery dragged on, God was working out a miraculous plan to set her and her people free. Let's take a look at what happened to Moses in Midian, a story he would have likely later told his older sister.

Read Exodus 2:24 – 4:16.

1. What does God say His concerns are and why does He appear to Moses?

God's introduction to Moses is also a preview of Christ's incarnation. In Exodus 3:6-10, He says He has seen their oppression, He has come down, and He will rescue them and take them to a better place. In a similar way, God saw our enslavement to sin, came down as a man, and rescued us to take us to Heaven and live with Him there.

2. God introduces Himself to Moses as the "God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Underline what God is saying about Himself and what He will do in each of the following verses:

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." (Genesis 17:1-2)

That night the LORD appeared to [Isaac] and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham." (Genesis 26:24)

And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." (Genesis 35:11-12)

And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, "Jacob! Jacob!" "Here I am," he replied. "I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes." (Genesis 46:2-4)

What does it mean, then, when God says to Moses that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

3. Moses initially objects to being sent by God to Pharaoh. What are his objections in Exodus 3:11, 3:13 and 4:1? How does God respond?"

Moses' Objection

God's Response

4. What is the new name for Himself that God reveals to Moses and, through him, to the Hebrews?

"I AM WHO I AM" is the great, all-encompassing name of our God, considered by the Hebrews to be too holy to pronounce. Jesus takes this name for Himself in John 8:58, declaring that He is God Himself in the flesh. We could fill rooms with books and pages describing the character of God, but it is all summed up in these two simple words.

Fill in the blanks below with some ways that God has demonstrated Himself to be "I AM" in your life.

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

I AM _____

Exodus 4:18-26 is a puzzling part of Moses' return to Egypt. Since the Hebrew language doesn't have any pronouns, some confusion may come from the difficulty English translators have in trying to figure out who is being spoken of and when. In your Bible, Exodus 4:24 may say that the Lord was trying to kill Moses, but that doesn't seem to make sense if Moses was to be God's representative before Pharaoh. But this verse can also be translated that the Lord came to take the life of Moses' son who was apparently not circumcised. In either case, it is clear that circumcision is the issue in question.

5. **According to Genesis 17:9-14, why was God upset with Moses?**

6. **Why do you think Moses having an uncircumcised son was an important issue for the Lord to address? How might it have affected his work among the Hebrews and his mission before Pharaoh?**

7. **What issues might the Lord be calling to you to address as you consider your service to Him? Would you pray about that right now?**

DAY FIVE: OUR OWN JOURNEY

For each of us, our journey of faith begins in a similar fashion to Miriam and Moses. We begin born into slavery under a cruel and harsh master called sin (John 8:34). We are frail and helpless to save ourselves, like a newborn baby condemned to death (Ephesians 2:1). Let's take some time to look back at the beginning of our own "exodus."

1. **What were you like before you placed your trust in Jesus to save you, just as Moses was placed into the basket on the Nile River? What have you been saved from? You might look back at Day Two of this week's lesson to start your thinking.**

2. **Was there someone or some circumstance that helped you into the basket? Someone who watched over you, prayed for you, or loved you enough to give you an opportunity to be saved? Thank the Lord for that person now.**

- 3. Is there someone in your life that you need to help into the basket of salvation? Write that person's name below and take a few moments to pray for them.**

- 4. We, like Moses, have been saved not just for our own sakes but in order to fulfill God's purposes and plans for our lives. (Ephesians 2:10). What are some of your objections to God's call of salvation on your life? What are your objections to His call to you to serve in His Kingdom? Would you take those objections to God in prayer and see how He would answer them?**

- 5. If you have never trusted in Jesus to save you from slavery into a new life of freedom, would you consider getting into that basket of salvation and letting Jesus carry you to safety? Pray that God would deliver you from the death sentence on your soul and deliver you safely into His Kingdom!**

NOTES: