

□□□□□ MIRIAM □□□□□

**Exodus 1:22-2:10; 15:19-21; Numbers 12:1-15**

**"Who does he think he is, this little brother of mine!"**

Psychologists tell us that birth order within the family has a great effect on each child. Firstborn children, they say, are often achievers. They tend to talk and walk earlier and have a larger vocabulary at an earlier age. Firstborns have a tendency to act cautiously, hoping thereby to avoid making mistakes. They tend to be perfectionists. Miriam, who was the oldest daughter of devout Levite parents, was the sister of Aaron and Moses, the youngest of their three children. Girls of Old Testament times were taught the responsibility of running a household at a very early age. Miriam undoubtedly learned how to prepare food, bring in water, and take a major role in the care of her younger brothers, all under the watchful eye of her mother.

The Israelites had become a large nation of people in Egypt and, in the eyes of the Pharaoh, a threat to the security of the nation. They had lived in Egypt for almost 400 years, having begun their pilgrimage there while Joseph was the ruler. Jacob's family of 70 had grown to well over a million; they were a powerful workforce in the expanding Egyptian economy, especially after they were forced into slavery. Their numbers continued to grow, so Pharaoh ordered all male children born to Hebrew parents be thrown into the Nile River, certain death for each little boy. Moses' parents, along with countless others, were horrified at this directive from the Pharaoh. They were about to have a child, and when the baby turned out to be a boy, they used their imagination and ingenuity to keep him alive. They hid their tiny baby for three months, always fearful that their secret might be given away and their child brutally taken from them and drowned. When Moses was three months old and hiding him was no longer possible, Moses' mother decided on a new course of action to protect their son. She fashioned a papyrus basket and coated it with tar and pitch to make sure it was seaworthy. Then she laid her infant son in it and placed it among the reeds, so common in Egyptian waters. At this point Miriam, the older sibling, was called on to do her part. She was to be the sentry and to report back on what happened to Moses once he was in his little boat.

All of us are familiar with the ending of the story...how the Egyptian princess found the baby in the basket, had compassion on him and rescued him from certain death. Watching from a distance, Miriam then approached the princess and asked if she wanted a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby. Receiving an affirmative response, she went and got her mother. Moses stayed with his parents until he was old enough to be taken to the palace where he was given the finest education and the best of everything.

Little is heard of Miriam until God called Moses to be the leader of Israel leading his people back to the promised land. The Bible calls her a prophetess who took a tambourine in her hand and sang and danced once the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea in safety and the Egyptian army had perished in their attempt to force the Israelites back to Egypt. She held a position of honour under Moses' leadership. He may have felt gratitude to her for her role in saving his life.

Perhaps he gave her a position of honour because of family loyalty. Later in the journey, however, both Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses "because of his Cushite wife.

While using Moses' wife as an excuse to speak against him, their real reason was jealousy. They asked, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't he also spoken through us?"

Numbers 12:1 NIV They were jealous of God's close relationship to their younger brother. They felt slighted to think the youngest of them would be accorded such a great honor while they were given less. The Lord heard their words and called all three into His presence. Coming in a pillar of cloud, He asked Miriam and Aaron why they were not afraid to speak against Moses, with whom He (God) himself spoke face to face. The Bible says the anger of the Lord burned against them, and when the cloud lifted, there stood Miriam, leprous. Aaron pleaded with Moses to intercede for Miriam, which he did. God, however, punished her with seven days of leprosy, after which she returned, cleansed. Numbers 12:5-15

Jealousy is described by St. Paul as one of the acts of the sinful nature. It brings about discord in the home as well as in the church. Jealousy has no place in either. Who would question God when He chooses to bestow His blessing in unequal measures? No one should. There is a lesson in the example of Miriam, who chose to question God's motives in His dealings with the members of her family, and yet God forgave His servant in her weakness and continued to use her in His service.

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Prayer: Lord, it's so easy to look around the world and feel we have been short-changed. Do not let jealousy get in the way of our family and church relationships. Help us to be thankful for all the blessings of body and soul You give us so freely each and every day. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

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