

Our Bible Sisters:

Miriam—Trusting God with Your Position in Life

Leader's Guide

This Bible study was written by Marilyn Miller, a staff minister at Abiding Word Lutheran Church in Houston, TX. The theological content was reviewed by Professor-emeritus Joel Gerlach.

Our Bible Sisters is a series of one-hour studies that may be used separately or in any combination. Each looks at a different woman of the Bible, highlighting God's faithfulness in her life, with applications to the lives of all Christian women today.

Miriam—Trusting God with Your Position in Life

Opening Prayer

Someone once said, “The hardest instrument to play is second fiddle.” This was the assignment that God gave to the woman, Miriam. Though she was the oldest child in the family, Miriam grew up in the shadows of her two younger brothers, Aaron and Moses. She would become one of the most prominent and respected women in Israel, but she would struggle with following the lead of her baby brother... She served as a faithful public servant. But it was also Miriam who became jealous of her brother’s position and publicly voiced her dissent... Her life is an example of how God deals with those who will refuse to trust authority he places in their lives.

(Barber, page 23)

The Scene

Egypt is under a new pharaoh. The Israelites, slaves of the Egyptians, are growing rapidly in number and their masters fear they will become too populous and powerful. Pharaoh orders that all Israelite boys be killed at birth. In this setting Moses is born.

1. From Exodus 2:1-10, what do we learn about Miriam’s role in keeping him safe?

She watched over the baby in his basket in the Nile, approached Pharaoh’s daughter to offer to get someone (her mother) to nurse the child—imagine the bravery this 10-12 year old girl needed to approach this powerful woman with such an offer.

2. Why were Miriam’s actions so important in the young life of Moses?

1) Allowed him to live instead of being killed as other boys at that time

2) Raised by his own mother who taught him to know and love his Lord

3) As part of the royal family, he was provided the best training and education available in the world at that time

Miriam’s Family

3. What do we know about Miriam’s family?

- Her siblings? (1 Chronicles 6:3)

Moses and Aaron, maybe some sisters?

- Her parents? (Exodus 6:20)

Jochobed and Amram, very godly parents who defied the law of the land to save the life of their son

- Her position in the family? (Exodus 7:7)

She was the oldest (maybe 10 when Moses born?) of the three, then Aaron, then Moses 3 years younger than Aaron

- Her husband?

We aren't told about a marriage; being a single woman in these times would have been exceptional

- Family occupation?

Slaves, difficult life filled with hard work

Miriam's Leadership

4. Miriam grew into a role of responsibility and leadership. What did she do after God separated the Red Sea so that the Israelites could escape from Pharaoh? (Exodus 15:19-21)

She led the women in a song of praise and thanksgiving to God, possibly as a chorus to the men's song recorded in the first part of the chapter. She was an exceptional example of godly faithfulness as she helped the people express their praise. It is evident that she was a recognized leader, comfortable with her leadership role and a talented poet.

5. By this time she would have been about 90 years old. Here she is called a prophetess. What is a prophet or prophetess?

A prophet is someone who speaks God's Word to the people, is God's specially appointed spokesperson.

6. Micah 6:4 also tells us she had a special calling from God—note that God says “he sent her” to Israel. Quickly scan 1 Chronicles 6:2-30. Do you see anything significant in the inclusion of Miriam in this list?

She is the only woman. From other lists in the Bible we see that women are included only if they play an exceptional or prominent role. Seeing a woman in such a role in the Bible is rare.

Miriam's Attitude

As the Israelites continued their march through the desert, they quickly forgot about their dismal lives in Egypt and complained. Read Numbers 11:1-4, 11:10-20 and 11:31-33 to see the difficulty Moses had leading the Israelites.

7. What changes in leadership did God make in 11:16-17 and how might this have affected Miriam's attitude?

Did she feel slighted as 70 elders were called to help Moses carry the burden of leadership? Moses sees them as an asset, does she see them as a threat? Was she discontent with her position, jealous of the elders?

8. Read Numbers 12:1-2. What do we learn about Miriam's actions and her motives from these verses?

She instigated the discussion against Moses; she used his marriage as a pretext though this could be a valid concern since a Cushite would probably have been an unbeliever or she might have resented his bringing a foreigner into such a position (first lady) in her country. She appeared jealous of the way God had just used Moses as the primary leader of the people. She (along with Aaron) was bypassed in favor of the 70 elders, who could now also prophesy. This led her to attempt to undermine God's chosen leader.

9. Compare her attitude with that of Moses given us in Numbers 12:3.

She was jealous and full of pride—wanted power for herself; he was humble—knew power and position came from God.

God's Response

10. Read Numbers 12:4-16. When and how does God begin dealing with the controversy?

Immediately the Lord spoke. Brought all 3 together so there would be no misunderstandings and no opportunity to talk behind each other's back (this is always a good way to solve a problem).

11. What is the main point of God's message to Miriam and Aaron?

Remind them he had a different relationship with Moses than with them or any others, even though they had a special relationship with God that most others did not have. He also demanded accountability from them.

12. Why might only Miriam be struck with leprosy?

She instigated the "rebellion"; she was a leader who focused on herself rather than on God's will; she was a prominent woman who tried to usurp the calling of headship that God gives to men, in this case, specifically to her brother.

13. Was there any consequence for Aaron?

God's anger burned against THEM.

Proper Attitude

14. What if Miriam really could have done a better job than the 70 elders that Moses named? Would she then have been justified in her attitude and comments?

No, abilities had nothing to do with it. God had not placed her in that role.

15. What are the proper attitudes to keep in mind when we think about the leaders God places in his church, workplace and home?

Respect, support and encourage them in their leadership; remember that God placed them into those positions and is supporting and guiding them. Pray for them continually.

God-given Roles

16. We can use the word vocation to describe the roles God gives us in life. Martin Luther once said, “Every ox wants a saddle and every horse a plow.” What did he mean?

We are often tempted to desire a role other than the one God gives us; in pride we think we could do a better job and covet others’ roles; we often despise the roles God gives us rather than serving joyfully and with contentment.

17. Talk about a time when you were tempted to covet another’s position or under-appreciate your vocation. How did that affect your attitude?
18. Contrastingly, talk about a time when God blessed you with contentment in your role. How did that impact your contentment?

Repentance

19. Read Numbers 12:11-12. What does this tell us about repentance?

“My lord”—Aaron expresses submission to Moses showing he accepted the Lord’s reprimand, recognizes and confesses his sin, he changes his thinking, he takes responsibility for his actions and doesn’t blame others, pleads for help.

20. What do we learn about the consequence of Miriam’s sin from Numbers 12:13-16?

God required it, her shame was public (can you imagine her calling “unclean!” to those she used to lead?), it was limited in time (did the prayer of her brothers have anything to do with this?), the people waited for her—retained their respect for her. We do well to apply this to our own sins as well as when others sin; God forgives and makes us whole once again.

21. Do you think she was repentant?

Her disease disappeared after 7 days so we could infer from this that she had repented. Biblical history remembers her in honor rather than shame so this also indicates she repented. But, we are not told for sure.

22. Read 1 John 1:8-9. When we repent of our sinful attitudes and actions, what is God’s promise to us?

God is faithful and just and will forgive us and cleanse us from our sins.

Lessons from Miriam's Life

23. God shows us the gifts he gave Miriam and her faithfulness in using them. He also shows us her sins. What might we learn from Miriam's story?

- 1) *She loved her Lord and was a great blessing to the people as she used her unique gifts.*
- 2) *We wouldn't necessarily expect her to sin in the way she did. She rebelled against her entire life's mission; we so easily do the same.*
- 3) *Jealousy and pride can affect even the most faithful and respected of church leaders*
- 4) *God forgives...*

Closing Prayer/Meditation

What God Ordains is Always Good CW 429 vs. 1

*What God ordains is always good;
His will is just and holy.
As he directs my life for me,
I follow meek and lowly.
My God indeed In ev'ry need
Knows well how he will shield me;
To him, then, I will yield me.*

For further thought:

In the coming days, make a list of the various vocations God has given you. Pray that God would strengthen you for faithful service and contentment in those roles. Pray for the leaders in your church, pray for the leaders in your workplace, and if you are married, pray for your husband's leadership in your home.

References:

Lockyer, Herbert. All the Women of the Bible
Barber/Rasnake/Shepherd. Life Principles from the Women of the Bible