

MIRIAM'S STORY

Miriam prophet, leader and poet was the older sister of Moses and Aaron. You can read about her in Exodus 2; Exodus 15; Numbers 12; Numbers 20:1; Micah 6:4. These passages can be found at <https://www.biblegateway.com>

We first encounter Miriam, living in Egypt, when her brother Moses was an infant. At that time Pharaoh had commanded that every Hebrew boy be thrown into the Nile. Moses' mother and father were able to hide the infant Moses and when he became too big to hide they placed him in a basket and put the basket in the Nile. Miriam, his older sister was tasked with looking over him. When Pharaoh's daughter saw the baby Moses in the water and indicated that she needed a wet nurse for him, Miriam offered to find one for her "Do you want me to go and find a nurse for you among the Hebrews to suckle the child for you?" Of course, Miriam brought her own Mother to Pharaoh's daughter. She was asked to care for Moses until he was older.

The next encounter with Miriam is when God exercises power over the Red Sea and enables the Israelites to escape from Egypt and Pharaoh's army. God's breath splits the sea open and dries up the sea allowing the Israelites to pass safely on dry ground. God then reverses the process and drowns the Egyptian army. The destruction of the Egyptian army is celebrated in the song of Moses, Exodus 15:1-18, followed by the song of Myriam, Exodus 15:22 *Then the prophet Miriam took a tambourine in her hand and all the women went out with her with tambourines and with dancing. Miriam sang to them "Sing to God who has triumphed gloriously, who has flung horse and rider into the sea."* The hymn praises God and gives the reason for praising God. It also provides the first couplet for Moses' hymn and some postulate that Moses' hymn may have been composed by Miriam.

In the third encounter Miriam and Aaron begin complaining about Moses because of his wife. It quickly gets to their real issue of their discontent with Moses status as the primary mediator of God's word to the community. "***Is it only through Moses that God speaks? Doesn't God speak through us also?***" (Numbers 12:2) At this God became angry with Miriam and Aaron for speaking against Moses the primary leader and indicates that their support is needed. God then inflicts a horrible skin disease on Miriam and she is excluded from the camp for seven days.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

What words or phrases stood out for you?

What was familiar?

What surprised you?

What were the ups and downs?

How did you feel about Miriam's punishment?

What associations did you make with the story? Similar experiences?

What was the significance of Miriam singing the song and the women dancing?

What is the meaning of Miriam's story for you?

How is the story beckoning to you?

What is the story beckoning you to know? To do?

HANNAH'S STORY

1 Samuel 1:1-28, 2:1-11 <https://www.biblegateway.com>

Hannah was Elkanah's second wife. His first wife, Peninnah, had children but Hannah had no children. Hannah's infertility was so upsetting that she couldn't eat. Her husband, Elkanah, loved Hannah and said *"Hannah why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart so sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"*

Hannah, still deeply distressed prayed and vowed *"Almighty God, if only you will look on the misery of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant but will give your servant a male child then I will dedicate him to you until the day of his death"*

Hannah did conceive and delivered a son, whom she named Samuel. When Samuel was weaned, she and Elkanah took Samuel to the temple. She said to Eli the Priest *"I asked Almighty God for this boy and God granted my request. Now I give him to God, for his entire life is given to Almighty God."*

Then Hannah prayed and said:

*"My heart rejoices in Yahweh, Almighty God ;
in Yahweh my horn[Ⓜ] is lifted high.*

*My mouth boasts over my enemies,
for I delight in your deliverance.*

2. *"There is no one holy like Almighty God;
there is no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.*

3. *"Do not keep talking so proudly
or let your mouth speak such arrogance,
for Almighty God is all knowing,
and weighs all mortal deeds.*

4. *"The bows of the warriors are broken,
but those who stumbled are armed with strength.*

5. *Those who were full hire themselves out for food,
but those who were hungry are hungry no more.
Childless women have borne seven children,
while mothers of many are forsaken.*

6. *"God brings death and makes alive;
it is God who brings down to the grave and raises up.*

7. *God sends poverty and wealth;
it is God who humbles and exalts.*
8. *Yahweh raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
Yahweh seats them among the mighty
and has them inherit a throne of honor.
“For the foundations of the earth are the ALMIGHTY GOD’S;
on them God has set the world.*
9. *God will guard the feet of faithful servants,
but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.
“It is not by strength that one prevails;*
10. *those who oppose God will be broken.
The Most High will thunder from heaven;
the ALMIGHTY ONE WILL judge the ends of the earth.
“Yahweh will give strength to the ruler
and exalt the head of the anointed one.”*

The song attributed to Hannah is a national thanksgiving and not related specifically to Hannah. It is the model for the Magnificat as sung by Mary the mother of Jesus. Luke 1:46-55. <https://www.biblegateway.com>

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

What words or phrases stood out for you?

What was familiar?

What surprised you?

How did you feel about Hannah bargaining with God?

What do you think of this approach?

What characteristics of Hannah did you admire?

How has the story of Hannah influenced your understanding of women in the Bible?

What is the main idea/message that you take away with you?