

Miriam

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Miriam in Egypt

Miriam was the older sister of both Aaron and Moses. Though both of her younger brothers overshadowed her, Miriam plays a very significant role in three incidents found in Exodus and Numbers. She was the protective sister of Moses in Exodus 2. Second, she was a prophetess who co-lead the singing of a newly crafted prophetic oracle in Exodus 15. And some years later she is pictured as an unhappy older woman who had the temerity to challenge Moses' leadership in Numbers chapter 12.

Miriam was a woman of faith (Mic. 6:4 with rest of sermon)

But despite the third sad incident, Micah 6:4 still remembers her on a level with Moses and Aaron as a woman of faith. Here's what it says,

For 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.

In context God is pointing out all the rich blessings that He had bestowed upon Israel. Miriam is still considered to have been a blessing hundreds of years later. God is saying that: I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Miriam was specifically sent by God to help Israel. And I believe she did. She obviously had a great deal of influence. And we will look at her prophetic role, because it was especially in her prophetic role that God had sent her to bring some of His messages to His people.

She was the daughter of Amram & Jochebed and sister of Moses and Aaron (Ex. 6:20; Numb. 26:59; 1 Chron. 6:3), of the tribe of Levi (Ex. 2:1; 6:16-20)

Numbers 26:59 tells us a little bit about her family. It says,

The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and to Amram she bore Aaron and Moses and their sister Miriam.

You might get the impression from that verse that Miriam was younger, but we will learn from Exodus 2 that she was actually the firstborn. She was older than both Aaron and Moses. It's just listing the boys first, then their sister. But that verse names everyone in that family of five. The parents (Amram and Jochebed), Miriam, and then her two brothers (Aaron and Moses). Moses was the baby of the family.

She was born into a pastor's home (Ex. 2:1; 6:18-20; Numb. 3:19; 26:58-59; 1 Chron. 6:2-3)

But if we start looking at Exodus 2 we will discover a third important fact about her: she was born into a pastor's home. Verse 1 simply says that her dad was from the house of Levi and so was her mom. But from the other passages in your outline it is clear that her dad was a pastor and the son of a pastor, and their mom was also born into a pastor's home. And from the stellar characteristics and faith that Miriam, Aaron, and Moses had, it is clear that the parents had been teaching the children well. So there was a rich heritage that God used to pass on the faith. Moses didn't appear as a man of faith out of nowhere. He was the beneficiary of sacrificial and godly labors to ensure that covenant succession would happen.

Now here is the thing. That didn't happen simply because she was born in a pastor's home. Covenant succession does not automatically happen anywhere or in any home. It must be worked at. Even pastors often fail to pass on the faith very well to their children. When I was growing up it was almost proverbial that the pastor's kids were the worst kids, and the dad's teaching in the church was somehow not transferred into the home. So the key point here is not whether your home is a pastor's home or not. The key is whether the Word of God saturates that home and you are passing on the faith to *your* children in a way that will pass on to *their* children. This had clearly happened for at least one family in Israel. And given the apostate status of the rest of Israel, this is really cool. We'll come back to that in a bit. But let's move on to the next point:

She was raised in a household that feared God more than they feared Pharaoh (Ex. 2:2 with Josh. 24:14; Acts 7:20; Heb. 11:17)

Exodus 2, verse 2 gives us more insight into the home she grew up in. It says,

So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months.

Now, that is not saying that if he had been ugly, that she would have tossed him. The Hebrew is actually a bit richer than the English here. The phrase that is rendered, "saw that he was a beautiful child" actually shows an awareness of *God's* approval of the baby. It's hard to render into English, but here is how Steven interprets this verse in Acts chapter 7. And I believe that this is a prophetic interpretation. I am reading from Acts 7:20, which is an interpretation of Exodus 2:2. He says,

At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God [or literally, beautiful to God]; and [and that word "and" is literally, with the result that] he was brought up in his father's house for three months.

So here it doesn't just say that he was beautiful. It says that he was beautiful to God. Every parent thinks their child is beautiful. That's not the point. Acts 7 interprets the Hebrew of Exodus 2:2 as if the parents knew something about God's good purpose in this child's life with the result that they hid him as long as they could. We don't base things on Hebrew tradition, but Hebrew tradition is totally consistent with Steven's interpretation. Extra

Biblical history says that God had revealed to the parents that Moses would be the deliverer of Israel. Somehow they had prophetic insight. But the inspired commentary in Acts 7 is sufficient to tell us that they knew *something* would be very significant about this child.

Hebrews 11:17 adds that they didn't just hide him out of parental instincts. Instead it says, "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." Since faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, it implies a faith in some revelation. This revelation from God not only gave them faith to hide Moses, it also gave them faith to not fear Pharaoh and to be willing to disobey Pharaoh. Yes, that disobedience flowed from faith. They were *not* doing this out of fear. They were doing this out of faith. So back to Exodus 2, let me read a small portion of Eugene Carpenter's exegesis of the Hebrew of verse 2. He says,

It is not sufficient to merely translate the term by saying he was a good baby or a beautiful baby. The Tendenz of the word is theological. Of course, as his mother, she would have striven to save him, but her reaction is reinforced *because she knew he was a special child*. Her response was to risk Pharaoh's wrath at all costs and to hide him for three months because of the impression the infant made on her... the implications of Moses' appearance are oracular [oracular means prophetic - "are oracular"] in nature and theological to the core in its current canonical location.¹

So he says that the Hebrew perfectly dovetails with the inspired interpretation that Steven gave. Let's just stop there and consider this for a bit. This was not presumption. God's *revelation* gave the parents faith to know that Moses was *tov* (טוב) or special. God's revelation also gave them the backbone needed to resist Pharaoh and to fear God more than they feared the king. And when we immerse ourselves in God's inscripturated revelation today, we are given faith to do what others refuse to do and we are given courage to do what others refuse to do. It is the Scriptures that have stirred up my faith to make a difference.

Why did she hide Moses? Chapter 1 tells us. Pharaoh had commanded the midwives to kill the baby boys. When they refused, Pharaoh made a general edict that Egyptians were to make sure that all male babies born to Israelite slaves had to be killed. Everyone was mandated to be a whistleblower on babies that had not been killed. Look at the last verse of chapter 1:

So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive."

Child sacrifice to the god of the Nile was common, but this was commanding a universal sacrificing of all male Jewish babies. It's amazing that this did not create an uprising all by itself. But as we will see in the next point, the entire Israelite population had been demoted to slavery and had a slave mentality. They were not fit for an uprising. They didn't have the

¹ Eugene Carpenter, Exodus, ed. H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick, vol. 1, *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 127–128.

worldview of the moral courage to do so. Moses certainly tried to begin rescuing them at age 40, but they were not ready to take the risks. But Amram and Jochebed were.

However, it is interesting that though they had faith and didn't fear the king's command, they took precautions. And we can learn from that. Trust in God does not mean laziness or failure to take precautions. When you are preparing for a rainy day, you can do so in faith.

But there are two other ways that Amram, Jochebed, and the whole family stood out from most of the other Israelites and were different.

The first way that they stand out is that they didn't worship the gods of the Egyptians like most Hebrews did. Slaves were expected to adopt the gods of their masters, and many did. Here's what Joshua 24:14 says about the majority of the Israelites:

Josh. 24:14 "Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!

That explicitly says that Israel as a whole worshiped the gods of Egypt when they were in Egypt. For Amram and Jochebed to refuse to do so was an act of treason against the Pharaoh, who was considered by the Egyptians to be the mediating god between the people and the other gods. So this shows something special about the whole family (including Miriam). They were willing to be treated as rebels in order to worship and serve the true and only God. And Hebrews 11 is quite clear that they had faith in God even at this early juncture.

But this second act of disobedience was *also* an act of rebellion against the king - and Hebrews 11 is explicit that it was a rebellion that flowed from faith in God. Too many modern Christians lack the faith of Amram and Jochebed. If the government says "obey," they appeal to a gross misinterpretation of Romans 13 that calls for blind obedience rather than rational God-directed obedience. They don't realize that Romans 13 is describing the ideal government and the limits of civil government. So these naive Christians don't ask whether the civil government even has the jurisdiction to make that commandment. That's an important question to ask. But they just passively obey. They don't have an ounce of resistance in their bones, which means that they don't have the kind of faith that this whole family had. If the government mandated COVID-19 vaccination, these modern Christians would submit. They might grumble a bit, but grumbling is not faithful resistance to tyranny. If the government mandated sending your children to government indoctrination centers, they would submit - and have in the past submitted, and have gladly submitted. They love being slaves. Oh, they might grumble a bit, but they love the benefits of the leeks and garlics too much.

Amram, Jochebed, and their children were made of better stuff. This whole family stood out from the rest of the population. There is no way that baby Moses could have been hidden from the slave owners and the police for three months if the whole family was not in on this resistance to tyranny. They worked together as a team in this interposition. The point is, this family of faith exhibited their faith through resistance to tyrannical decrees. Many of the pastors in the American War for Independence stated that resistance to tyranny is

obedience to God. It is. But it is also an expression of faith. And Miriam was in on that as a child - at least to some degree.

She was a slave along with her whole family (Ex. 1:10-2:10)

This would have been hard for them to do because they would have had to navigate a great deal of subterfuge to hide this fact from their masters. Keep in mind that chapter 1:10-22 make it clear that all the Israelites were slaves. And when Pharaoh mandated the killing of all baby boys, he wasn't going to be losing his slaves. The women and children would still be slaves. This means that Miriam, Aaron, Amram, and Jochebed were slaves who did not own their house, their food, or anything else. And by the way, you are slaves in the American system. You may not be as miserable in your slavery as these people were, but when a government taxes everything it is declaring ownership of everything.

Thankfully, our slavery is comfortable. Their's was not. If you glance at chapter 1, verse 14, you will notice that it says that their lives were bitter. Interestingly, this is what Amram and Jochebed named Miriam - bitterness. Miriam means bitterness. She was named after the bitterness of their bondage. The Greek version of that name is Mary or Mara - one of the most popular names for girls down through history. So the mother of Jesus was named after this Miriam in a sense. Miriam was the first one to bear that name. Bitterness would probably not have been a very popular name until this hero wore it. And Miriam was a hero even as a child. In any case, her slavery reminds us that God calls us to live by faith no matter how bad our circumstances might be. Even in the midst of bitterness we can live by faith.

She was protective of her younger brother (Ex. 2:3)

Verses 3-4 show that Miriam was also protective of her younger brother. Based on a couple of later Scriptures, I believe she may have already been hearing revelations from God herself, but even if that was not the case, Hebrews and Acts imply that the family had received revelations earlier by some means. As Steven hints, and as other Scriptures we will look at also indicate, they knew that Moses would be their deliverer. Moses knew that he would be the deliverer and Scripture says he assumed other Israelites would know that too. And Miriam was a big part of protecting this future deliverer of Israel. It says of Jochebed,

3 But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank. 4 And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him.

While Josephus claims traditions of a special relationship that Miriam had with Pharaoh's daughter, we can't know for sure. But it does seem odd that all of this would work out so well - that is, odd if you are not a supernaturalist who believes in God's providence like we do. This family did fulfill the letter of the Egyptian law but not the spirit of the law. Moses was literally thrown into the river, but not the way Pharaoh had intended. And why did they pick a spot so near to where Pharaoh's daughter bathed? Would this not be a breach of her privacy? And why was Miriam even allowed to be this close? And why wasn't she at work? And there are a bunch of other questions we may never get answers to. But the

central idea here is that Miriam is a protective oldest sibling who is trying to watch over her baby brother to the best of her ability. Did she carry over her protective habits into her adulthood as some people claim? It's possible. That may explain some things in Numbers 12. But here it is definitely a virtue.

She showed courage, initiative, and seizing of God's providences (Ex 2:5-9)

But the next verses of Exodus 2 show more cool character traits in Miriam. Verses 5-9.

Ex. 2:5 Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river.

To even be within sight of where the Pharaoh's daughter is bathing takes courage - enormous courage. But Miriam wanted to be available for whatever God might providentially do. I see her as waiting to see what God will do, but being ready to jump into action if anything dangerous happens. Verse 5 goes on:

And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. 6 And when she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children."

Ex. 2:7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?"

Wow! Where did *this* girl come from? Keep in mind that 4 says that Miriam stood afar off watching. So to suddenly be right there at the right moment took immediate seizing of what she saw might be an opportunity. God providentially made the baby cry and it touched the heart of the princess, and boom - out of nowhere Miriam appears and makes a fantastic suggestion; a very helpful suggestion to a princess who doesn't have a clue what to do to stop the baby from crying. She has never had a baby. Verse 8:

Ex. 2:8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the maiden went and called the child's mother. 9 Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him.

This is such a cool story! I wouldn't be surprised if Miriam reminded her brother of this a few times. But not only does the real mom (Jochebed) get to keep her son for 3-5 years, she will have royal protection and royal wages. Wow! What a cool providence. But Miriam's quick wittedness, resourcefulness, and faithfulness played into Moses even being alive. There is a sense in which Moses' owed her his life and lifestyle. And it may factor into some of the envy that Miriam feels of Moses in Numbers 12. "Moses, you wouldn't even be around if it wasn't for me."

Many people have written about the courage of Jochebed. But consider the courage and care that Miriam exhibited. She had a servant's heart and a protective heart for her baby brother. She doesn't act shy in the least. Like many firstborns she showed leadership and initiative. But she also stands as a wonderful model to boys and girls today to help their parents to guard, protect, and nurture the new babies as they come into the home. I believe this is a fantastic training ground for parenthood. And Miriam is a great model of older sisters caring for younger children.

She also positioned herself to be able to take advantage of whatever providence the Lord might bring their way, and instantly acted on it. Do we position ourselves to act on God's providences - what some people call "His divine appointments"? It may be a neighbor who stops to talk, or an inquisitive seat mate on the plane, or a misdialled phone number. Know that nothing in life is random, and be asking God to make you sensitive to grab hold of divine appointments and to make the most of them.

Also, don't discredit the small things that you do. Her simple willingness to serve ended up saving the life of Moses, but that in turn saved and delivered an entire nation. You never know what the small faithful steps of obedience you take will have upon the world.

Also, don't discredit your small role in life. Miriam wasn't Aaron and she wasn't Moses, but she was God's servant, and Micah says that God sent her and Aaron and Moses before the children of Israel. He sent her. Comparing ourselves to others creates envy and strife. Be faithful where you are planted and believe that God will accomplish exactly what He desires through you. God has sent each of you for a special purpose.

Miriam leaving Egypt (Exodus 12-15)

Well, let's turn to chapter 15 for the second major event. Miriam factors into the story of the Exodus out of Egypt in Exodus 12-15. We know that she would have had to have been in the home with Aaron and the rest of the family to partake of Passover on that first Passover night. We know that the blood would have been spread on the lintels of their house because Aaron didn't die. We know she saw all of the miracles. As a prophetess the significance of all these things wasn't lost on her. And she helps the women celebrate the tremendous victory over the armies of the Pharaoh in Exodus 15.

And I love the fact that Exodus 15 illustrates parts singing. In this case all the main verses found in verses 1-19 were sung by the men, and at the end of each verse Miriam would lead the women with musical instruments and in singing the refrain found in verses 20-21. Let me read the refrain.

Ex. 15:20 Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. 21 And Miriam answered them: "Sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!"

Note the dancing in worship. No, it wasn't ballerina dancing, swing dancing, or country dancing. It was movements you could do in a crowded space; it was modest dancing. And you couldn't do whirling dancing when you were so packed together. But the point is that the use of the body in worship was not neglected. We are not gnostics who think the body is unimportant. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 speaks of the importance of even our bodies being sanctified or set apart to the Lord. Consider your posture in worship - is it a posture that glorifies God? Don't just consider your spirit. Do you worship appropriately with your body? I think it's worthwhile for each of us to examine ourselves on that point.

Note also the use of musical instruments. I've written an entire book on the use of instruments in worship because of the gnostic tendencies in some circles that turn all

references to instruments into something intangible inside of our hearts. But these are real instruments and God loves quality instrumental music.

And notice too that there were female players on instruments as well. Contrary to the non-instrumentalist viewpoint, it wasn't just Levite priests who played instruments. And it wasn't just in temple services that it happened. In Psalm 68:24 it says, "The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among them were the maidens playing timbrels. Bless God in the congregations..." Congregations (plural) would be a reference to worship in the synagogues. In other words, there were musical instruments that accompanied the singing in the temple and there were musical instruments that accompanied the singing in the synagogues (the congregations - plural). And women contributed to the instrumental music.

Also note the fact that Miriam wasn't a worship leader of the whole congregation. She wasn't talking. She wasn't preaching. She wasn't leading the whole congregation in prayer, something that 1 Timothy 2:8 reserves to the men. She was the lead female singer who led the *women* in singing, not the men. Moses led the men. It was an answer or an antiphonal response. In our music team we try to have the male voice lead the whole congregation and the female voice lead the women's parts. That seems to be the pattern throughout the Bible.

And note too that the women were not in the least bit squeamish about God's violent victory and all the floating bodies of Egyptians washing up on the shore. They rejoiced in God's judgments. They said Amen to God's judgments. These weren't Victorian women who fainted at the sight of blood. They rejoiced as they sang,

"Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!"

Their attitude was, "Hallelujah! Praise God for His judgments." And they probably sang that same chorus at the end of each verse that Moses was leading. Again, this shows creativity in music.

But this passage not only shows Miriam's prophetic gifts, and her musical talent, but it also shows her leadership of women. She was a woman of faith that had some very helpful talents.

Miriam's rebellion (Numb. 12)

But even faithful men and women can become proud - proud of what God has given them, and can ruin the good reputations that they have had. I have seen this over and over - where even pastors foolishly ruin their reputations.

If you turn to Numbers 12 you will see that this heroine had her flaws. This is the third major mention of her in the Scripture. As a result of her gossip, insubordination, and spread of discontent, she endangered the whole nation. She thought what she was doing was good, but rather than this being a prophetic word from the Lord, it was her flesh showing up. Somehow Miriam talked Aaron into believing that Moses needed intervention; that he was taking too much upon himself. And it illustrates how easily bitterness, envy, discontent,

gossip, rebellion, and divisiveness can spread. Here Aaron took sides with her. But this drove Moses more and more to prayer. Let's take a little closer look at this particular problem in Numbers 12.

Miriam clearly has issues with ethno prejudice (vv. 1,10-13) and rebellion (vv. 2-8)

I see Miriam as the instigator here and Aaron as the passive leader who followed a critical spirit without realizing the sinful implications (his first fault) and without correcting it (his second fault). Given how easily Aaron is swayed by people in the golden calf incident, it is very possible that Aaron was easily led and influenced by Miriam his whole life. But there were three distinct character problems that appear to have driven Miriam.

The first character problem was ethno prejudice. Verse 1 says,

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

There are some people who claim that Ethiopians were the same as Midianites and that this is therefore Zipporah. They claim that his wife was not of a darker complexion. But I think that is extremely unlikely. Of the twenty verses that use the Hebrew word *Cush* (or Ethiopian) they show a region that covers Ethiopia, Nubia, and Sudan - all three of which Scripture identifies as having dark skin. Jeremiah 13:23 makes clear that the people of Cush have a different skin color than most Israelites when it says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?" Anyway, it appears that Zipporah had died and that Moses had married this Ethiopian. So God identifies the sin as being ethnic prejudice against this woman. And this whole passage shows that God is very upset with ethnic prejudice, whether it comes from skinheads or BLM. Speaking against people because of their ethnicity is wrong. Critical Race Theory is sinful to the core because it makes all whites so-called "racists" - which would itself then be a "racist" concept.

Her second sin was gossip. Miriam and Aaron have obviously been talking about the woman behind the back of Moses. And since God says that the problem was the woman and yet their words are something else, it appears that they have strategized on what would be the best way to confront Moses. He obviously is getting too high handed and he needs to go.

The third issue is rebellion against authority. And interestingly, even though their first offense was the ethnic origin of this wife of Moses, they don't raise that question with him. Instead, they act as if Moses is being tyrannical. They attack his authority. Why does God say that their opposition was because of the Ethiopian woman and yet their words have to do with his position? Well, it is to illustrate that sin has a way of masquerading itself as something different - something more spiritual. If they had just said point-blank, "You shouldn't be married to an Ethiopian," it would have been easy for Moses to say, "Where is that command in the law of God?" and they would come up shorthanded. It would have been very easy for Moses to deal head-on with racism (or since there is only one race, it is better to speak of it as ethno-prejudice). But they didn't talk about the ethnic issue even

though that was the underlying thing that drove them *to* their rebellion. And rebellion frequently has other hidden sins that drive it and motivate it.

In any case, they pointed to Moses' leadership and claimed that he was prideful and that his refusal to share authority meant that he should step down from office. It's really hard to defend yourself against an attack like that. If you don't defend yourself, this rebellion will gain steam with others. If you *do* defend your position, you look prideful. You can't win. In verse 3 God says clearly that Moses was not prideful. It was a false accusation. Beginning to read at verse 2

2 So they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it. 3 (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)

Yet how many times do humble people get accused of pride and abusive leadership? It's a very hard accusation to defend yourself against. There is such a thing as abusive leadership, but *Moses* should not have been accused of it.

In verses 4 and following God commands them to come to the tabernacle of meeting, and they know they are in trouble. God tells them that their attack on Moses' authority was an attack on God. You cannot undermine the chain of command without undermining God Himself. When children disobey the mother, they are disobeying the father (unless of course the mother has contradicted the father), and in the process they are disobeying God. When wives disobey their husbands, they are disobeying God. When members rebel against the church elders, they are rebelling against God - unless of course the elders' commands are unbiblical. In our egalitarian age people take attacks on authority way too lightly. So the life of Miriam illustrates God's hatred of tyrannical abuse of authority (in the case of Pharaoh) and it also illustrates God's negative attitudes to insubordination to true authority. Both extremes must be avoided. Anyway, Miriam and Aaron don't seem to see their insubordination as being a serious sin at all.

Aaron clearly has problems with being influenced by her critical spirit (vv. 1-5 with vv. 10-12)

If you read through the whole chapter you will see that Aaron's main problem was that he had allowed himself to be manipulated by his sister and he had failed to lead by failing to correct her. He should have been involved in putting out the fire rather than adding fuel to the fire. She complained about authority. She arrogated authority to herself and to her brother that God had not given. The very pride that she falsely accused Moses of having, she herself had.

When did her attitudes toward Moses change? We don't know for sure, but the text seems to imply that it started with his marriage to this Ethiopian. And once negative thinking crept in, it began to poison her attitudes toward him as a person and then toward him as an authority. And then she begins to reverse Philipians and think more highly of herself than she does of her brother. If negative thinking is not nipped in the bud immediately, it spirals out of control just like hers did and gets worse and worse. And all of us can be subject to negative thinking. I used to be a Murphy's law guy, always thinking of the negative

possibility. And I was so disgusted with my negative thinking that I gave myself extensive homework to discipline my thinking in a faith direction. And if you want a copy of that homework, I can certainly share it with you. Negative thinking must be put off.

God's rebuke (vv. 4-16)

And the reason I say that the primary issue was with Miriam was because she was the only one to get leprosy. Yes, Aaron got a severe rebuke, but only Miriam gets leprosy. And look at the nature of the discipline in verse 10:

And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper.

It was ethno-prejudice that was driving Miriam, and since Miriam prided herself in her lighter colored skin, God made her skin absolutely white - leprous white; horrifyingly white; dead fish white. The discipline fit the sin. That whole section is a rebuke against Kinism. It is also a rebuke against milder forms of prejudice that make marriage to someone of a different skin color a sin.

Now, in all of this, I want to emphasize that God didn't avoid situations that would be stressful. That's our tendency - "Let's just avoid the stress; let's not address the problem." In contrast, God *planned* for stressful situations to arise in order to cause those in leadership to grow and to cause those under leadership to learn. Don't shield your children and your family from difficult work, difficult stress, or difficult people. That's counterproductive. Granted, there are some people that we must avoid at all costs - for example, God calls us to not so much as to eat with divisive people. You need to shun divisive people. God takes out divisive people in the Pentateuch. But *difficult* people is a different matter. Difficult people can actually help our children to grow spiritually and to learn how not to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good. The stresses can be tools of our growth.

She allowed her God-given gifts to get to her head (Numb. 12:6-8)

But verses 6-8 show that she had allowed her God-given gifts to get to her head. She was a prophetess and she thought, "What makes Moses think he is any better than me?"

Num. 12:6 Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. 7 Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. 8 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?"

Very interesting words - "Why were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" We should fear and tremble before God and not think of attacking leadership without just cause or just methods.

Now, in these words God is not denying that Miriam and Aaron were prophets. He is just saying that the revelations He gave through Moses were far more foundational to the faith. Even inspired prophets who gave infallible revelation can sin when they aren't giving revelation. God only preserves them from mistakes during the prophetic inspiration

process. But they can make mistakes when the Spirit has not seized them and used them as a tool for inspiration. For example, Peter was an inspired apostle when he wrote, but Galatians 2 shows that he was quite capable of sin when not inspired. In any case, here God is saying that He had set Moses apart to give foundational revelation. From hindsight we know how foundational. Every ethical principle is contained in the Pentateuch. The seeds of every later doctrine are found there. In contrast, her revelations (while inspired and inerrant) were for a specific audience and not for the church of all time. We don't have any of her revelations, unless the chorus that the women sang was written by her. But she is comparing herself to Moses and saying that she hears from God just as clearly as Moses does. It's envy.

God got angry at Miriam and Aaron (Numb. 12:9)

And then in verse 9 God gets angry. Verse 9 corrects a huge misconception that many in the Gospel Coalition have spouted, and that is that God never gets angry with a justified believer. Their idea is that since we are righteous in Christ, all God sees is Christ's righteousness and He can't get mad at righteousness. And so, to quote Steve Brown, "If I am truly free, then I am free to spit or cuss in God's presence." In his books he claims that it is impossible for God to get angry at justified believers. Well, that is a simplistic understanding. It is true that we will never have to stand before the judge of all the earth when He condemns His enemies. We are not enemies. We will forever be in His family. But once we are adopted into His family, there are some sins that still get our Father angry at us. Let's read verses 9-16 where God compares Himself to a father who is angry with a daughter who has disgraced him - perhaps with fornication or in some other way has ruined the family name.

Num. 12:9 So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed. 10 And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper. 11 So Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned. 12 Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb!"

That sure sounds like true leprosy. And in verse 13 we see the incredible forgiveness, humility, and patience of Moses.

Num. 12:13 So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "Please heal her, O God, I pray!"

But God is not quite so ready to treat this lightly. He thinks Moses is being too soft. There are some sins that require more severe discipline - even after forgiveness is granted. When our kids saw discipline coming they would often repent, hoping to get out of the discipline. It might have made the discipline less severe, but Scripture indicates that discipline is a sign of love. But some sins must be taken super seriously. In our family lying and outright rebellion always received far more severe discipline. I would often say, "Here is the lighter discipline you would have received if you had not lied about your sin. Now comes the discipline for lying - which was way worse." And by the way, this is sometimes even necessary in the church. Temporary suspension from the table sometimes has to happen even after repentance on particularly serious sins. The church has historically done this for

the glory of God's name and the reputation of the church as well as to instill the fear of the Lord into the congregation. Anyway, verse 14.

Num. 12:14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterward she may be received again." 15 So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in again. 16 And afterward the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran.

Several things that we can see here: First, God gets angry with true believers - even with heroes of the faith. In Psalm 6 David spoke of God's anger and hot displeasure flaring against him. In Exodus 4:14 God got angry with Moses. It says, "So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses..." 1 Kings 11:9 says that God got angry with Solomon. Steve Brown and other antinomians are absolutely wrong. God does get mad at justified believers. You see, God is not a stoic who is indifferent to whether you keep His commandments or you don't keep His commandments. He is a Person, and as a Person He can be aroused to anger. And it was knowing that God does get angry that motivated David to forsake his sin and rebellion in Psalm 6. In other words, the anger of God is a practical doctrine. I believe reflecting upon the anger of God is a great motivator for holiness, yet it is a doctrine almost totally ignored by evangelicals today.

A second thing that we see is that God often disciplines us with a comparable pain. In other words, the discipline meets the offense. She wanted honor and she gets shame. She envied Moses' position and no one will envy her position. She had pride and God humbles her. She was prejudiced against the Ethiopian's dark skin and God says, "You don't like dark skin? Well, see how you like ultra white skin? Dead fish white?" By the way, this is a proof text against the idea that Leviticus 13:13 means that a completely leprous person is clean. Rather, most commentators take that earlier passage as indicating healing from leprosy, with the white skin being the newly emerged skin after exfoliation - just like a baby's skin.² Naaman's skin was untanned - it was white like the skin of a newborn child after he was healed. Gehazi was snow white from head to toe with leprosy, but he had to go out of the presence of God's people as unclean. So Leviticus 13:13 cannot mean that you suddenly become clean once you become totally leprous. And clearly Miriam was unclean even though every square inch of her body was white as snow. And she had seven days of unclean ness after she was healed.

² Examples: Milgrom says, "Healing has occurred by desquamation; the scaly crust peels off, leaving white beneath (G. R. Driver 1963: 576a). It is a sign of exfoliative dermatitis (Hulse 1975: 95)." Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 785. Harris says, "Apparently it means that the rash had gone, leaving the skin white. Perhaps the whiteness would refer to new skin, not as sun-bronzed as usual. However, if raw flesh appeared (vv.14-15), the man was unclean." R. Laird Harris, "Leviticus," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 577.

I am not entirely sure why God says, “If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days?” I haven’t found anything else in the law of God that would give us a clue on this. It seems like God is indicating what *her* dad (Amram) would have done to her if she had rebelled this way in front of him - whether rightly or wrongly. And being spit upon, there was uncleanness. But that is just a guess. That phrase is a puzzle to me.

In any case, in verse 11 there is immediate repentance on the part of Aaron and asking that Miriam’s leprosy be lifted. Both were in sin, but only Miriam received the severe discipline. To me this shows that she was the ring leader. It may be that her being older than Moses led to this. It may have been jealousy over his prophecies being more listened to than hers. It could have been other issues of conflict. But ultimately God saw her as being the primary cause of this rebellion. And if that can happen to a heroine like Miriam, it can happen to you. Be ultra careful that you do not buy into the rebellious and divisive attitudes of other people. By the way, she is probably close to 90 when all this happened. The ages of Miriam, Aaron and Moses are remarkable.

But this passage also shows mercy. God healed her, or she would have been excluded from the camp indefinitely. But even after healing, Leviticus 14:8 requires seven days more of exclusion.³ So it is like God is making sure she has plenty of time to think about what she has done. And the whole camp had to wait for her, so her discipline was also a lesson to *them*. But their waiting for her shows that this discipline was an act of love, not an act of rejection. She lived a few more years and was buried in Numbers 20:1.

God wants us to remember Miriam (Deut. 24:9; Mic. 6:4)

The last thing I will mention is that there are two later Scriptures where God calls us to remember Miriam. Deuteronomy 24:9 tells us, “Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out of Egypt!” How humiliating this command could have been for Miriam - that is, if she had not learned her lesson of grace. For all time, people are commanded to learn from her rebellion and its discipline. But I like to think of Miriam as having learned her lesson of grace so well that she would be the first to tell you the exact same thing - “Hey, guys, don’t rebel. It’s not worth it. Learn from me. Look what happened to me.” You know that God has done a good work in our lives when our past shame becomes a teaching tool for the next generation. We don’t hide it; we use it to teach others. I think over time our interns have learned almost as much from my past failures as they have from my past successes. I try to be an open book. Grace gives us the security to be able to obey such a command to remember Miriam, and if we are Miriam, to not be embarrassed by that, but to magnify God’s grace.

The second command is to not forget that God raised up Miriam, valued her, and used her. Micah 6:4 again:

³ “exclusion from one’s tent for seven days was prescribed for the cleansed leper (Lev 14:8)” Clyde M. Woods and Justin Rogers, *Leviticus–Numbers*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 2006), 254.

For 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.

This was said hundreds of years later. People were not appreciating all that God had done for them, and in a list of great benefits God had bestowed upon Israel, he says, “Hey, I gave you three great people, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.” Those three figures continue to remind us of all the blessings of the Pentateuch. Pusey says,

The use of the familiar language of the Pentateuch is like the touching of so many key-notes, recalling the whole harmony of His love. Moses, Aaron, and Miriam together, are Lawgiver, to deliver and instruct; Priest, to atone; and Prophetess to praise God; and the name of Miriam at once recalled the mighty works at the Red Sea and how they then thanked God.⁴

I think it is cool that Micah is reminded *mainly* of the neat things that Miriam did. We have a tendency to remember the negative things about other people and to let those circulate in our brains so much that we don't see the good things. Don't do it. Think by grace. Use my homework for putting off negative thinking. Be like Micah and appreciate the good in the Miriams in your life. Micah uses her as an example of how God had richly blessed Israel. God was having them count their blessings. None of the three of them were perfect, but God used all three.

And if you have had a major failure like Miriam did, don't let that make you stay outside the camp in shame forever. God still loves you and can use you. Stay the course, learn from grace, put on humility, determine to cling the more tightly to Jesus, and become a blessing to others like Miriam did. And may God be glorified in our responses to her life. Amen.

⁴ E. B. Pusey, *Notes on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets: Micah to Malachi*, vol. 2 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885), 81.