



SESSION THREE – MIRIAM’S PRAYER

Miriam is a key biblical figure who plays a central role in the story of God’s deliverance of his people from Egyptian enslavement. As God’s people wrestle with their understanding of and trust in who God is, Miriam is a witness to and participant in both their rescue and their tribulations.

CONTEXT

To reach Miriam’s prayer, we have to back up in the grand narrative of the Bible about 350 years before Hannah entered the picture. Miriam is born in Egypt, where God’s people (called the Hebrews or Israelites) have been living for at least 300 years. She lives during the time when the Hebrews had become enslaved, and she grows up amidst increasingly destructive policies targeting her people. Miriam is most likely the older sister mentioned in Exodus 2, who watches her mother save the infant Moses by floating him down the Nile River in a basket made of reeds after Pharaoh’s decree to kill all sons born to Hebrew women. Moses will grow up to become the man God sends to Pharaoh with the demand, “Let my people go.” After ten plagues that increasingly demonstrate God’s power and authority, Pharaoh relents and permits the Israelites to leave Egypt. They abandon the only homes they have known and depart Egypt, being led by God himself, who appears as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Right as it seems they have made it out without incident, Pharaoh sends his army after them, and they find themselves trapped between the chariots and the Red Sea.

Within this radically bewildering series of events, we meet Miriam, an ordinary Israelite woman immersed with her people as they are challenged by an unfolding understanding of God’s character and their role in his plan.

Read Exodus 14:5-31.

1. Provide a brief summary of what happens in each of the following sections:

a. Exodus 14:5-9

b. Exodus 14:10-12

c. Exodus 14:13-22

d. Exodus 14:23-31

2. Provide a brief sketch of the emotional, mental, and spiritual state of the Israelites in verses 10-12. Then compare that with their emotional, mental and spiritual state in verses 29-31.

Exodus 14:10-12	Exodus 14:29-31

7. Exodus 13:18 reads, “God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle.” In Exodus 14, who does the actual fighting? How does this relate to the promise Moses provided in Exodus 14:14?

8. Compare Exodus 14:31 to Ephesians 2:8-9. What do these verses indicate about how salvation, faith, and grace relate to one another?

9. In Hebrew, Jesus’s name is *Yeshua*, and it means “the Lord is salvation.” How does Exodus 14 speak to salvation as God delivers it, and how does it point forward to the salvation that is found in Jesus Christ?

THE PRAYER

It is not hard to imagine the Israelites standing on the far shore of the Red Sea in stunned silence, watching the immense peril that had so recently threatened their lives literally sinking away beneath the waves. And then it is natural to presume a mighty and triumphant shout would have risen from among the people. The jubilant celebration of and reflection upon the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptian army via God’s mighty hand forms the backbone structure of Miriam’s prayer.

Read Exodus 15:19-21. What is the main point of this short prayer that Miriam sings?

In the Bible, it is a relatively common practice that a short quotation from a section of Scripture is meant to elicit reminder of the *entire* passage from which it comes. Combined with text referring to Miriam specifically as a prophet—one who speaks the Word of God to his people—many scholars agree that Miriam was at least partially responsible for the longer-length prayer from which she quotes in verse 21. (Some Bibles will actually acknowledge this by using a

6. Relate what God is going to do for his people to his personal characteristics, using the chart below as a guide. (Note: Some of these are made explicit in the text, and others will require some extrapolation.)

Action God Will Take	Characteristic of God the Action Displays
Lead the people (v. 13)	
Guide the people (v. 13)	
Cause the enemies of God to tremble (v. 14)	
Remove enemies (v. 15)	
Still the people's enemies (v. 16)	
Establish the people in a new land (v. 17)	

7. What does verse 18 indicate about God's authority compared to Egypt (at the time the most powerful nation in the world) and the other national powers listed in verses 13-17? What does it have to say about the ability of any earthly power to come against God?
8. This prayer was sung during a time when the Israelite's understanding of God was in its early stages. They had certainly seen him do powerful things in service to their salvation, but they were still trying to work out who God is and what it meant to be his people. How does the story of Exodus 14 show the developing understanding they have, and how does that influence the prayer in Exodus 15?
9. How has your own prayer life been shaped and influenced as you have grown in your understanding of God and his character?

10. Notice that the first half of the prayer reflects on what God *has* done, and the second half switches to discussion of things he *will* do. A similar pattern characterized Hannah's prayer, as well. How might such a focus on both the past and the future develop a sense of both trust and hope in your own prayer life?

11. What does the prayer suggest Miriam believes about God? How do those beliefs shape how she approaches him in prayer?

PRACTICE

Miriam's prayer in Exodus 15 is rooted in the interaction she and her people have with God in Exodus 14. As the newly redeemed people of God, this prayer represents a powerful and important first step in their formulation of who God is and what that meant for how they would interact with and pray to him.

After watching God deliver them from slavery in Egypt and then again when they were trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea, Miriam leads the Israelites in singing a prayer that celebrated God's salvation.

1. Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Through your faith in Christ, what have you been saved from? According to verse 10, what response does God ask you to have?

2. Being more specific to your own life circumstances, what have you seen God give you deliverance from? What do you anticipate he will provide for you in the future?

The experience of Miriam and the Israelites which drove them into celebratory prayer was indelibly marked by God taking the initiative and defeating their enemies *for them*. In fact, in Exodus 14:14 they are explicitly instructed to be still and allow God to be the one who fights. God's victory comes about by unexpected means. No Israelite could have predicted that God would split the Red Sea, permit them to cross on dry land as their salvation, and then close the

waters over their enemies. The prayer in Exodus 15 reflects God's greatness and incomparable ability to bring about victory by his own hand and on his own terms.

1. What fight are you currently fighting that could be turned over to God instead?
2. What are *your* expectations for what winning the fight will look like? If you are able, consider potential alternatives for what winning the fight might mean *to God*.
3. List several attributes of God which make him fully capable of fighting in your stead.

Using your answers to the above questions as a guide, start a conversation with God which includes gratitude for the salvation he has already secured for you, confident affirmation of the characteristics that make him able to provide salvation and deliverance, and requests for assistance with your current struggles. Ask him what good works he might have already prepared for you to do in response to the salvation he has provided. Conclude by exploring any insights or prompting you feel the Holy Spirit is bringing to you through your study of Miriam's prayer.

Use the space provided below to write out your prayer, or to record your experience and insights gained as a result of your prayer.