

*For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt,
and redeemed thee out of the house of servants;
and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.*

Micah 6:4

Last week we learned about Rebekah, the Mother of Two Nations. These two nations would come through the lineages of Esau and Jacob. We learned about the birth of these two men in our last lesson. Now 300 years later, the Nation of Israel would finally be brought forth by the Lord. As an old man, Jacob had taken his family to safety in Egypt. Some time later, it would be his granddaughter (great-granddaughter) Miriam who would protect the baby Moses. He would lead the nation out of Egypt many years later when he was 80 years old.

So, Miriam would bridge the gap from the age of the patriarchs to the time of the Nation of Israel. And she would be one of the three leaders who took the Hebrews out of Egypt and helped found the Nation of Israel.

She was brave, strong and wise – even as a little girl. Later she was a song leader and effective encourager of the people as a prophetess. But then, sadly, she became jealous, headstrong, dominating and grasping for authority that God had not given to her.

We will see:

- (1) An example of bravery and wisdom – and faith in God, even in dangerous times.
- (2) An example of strong and godly leadership.
- (3) A caution that warns us against presumption.

Background

Scriptures in the Old and New Testaments confirm the details and timing of the Hebrews' time in Egypt and the date of their departure. The Bible gives the information clearly, but not all in one place. Because it is muddled by many commentators, here is the summary with some scripture references.

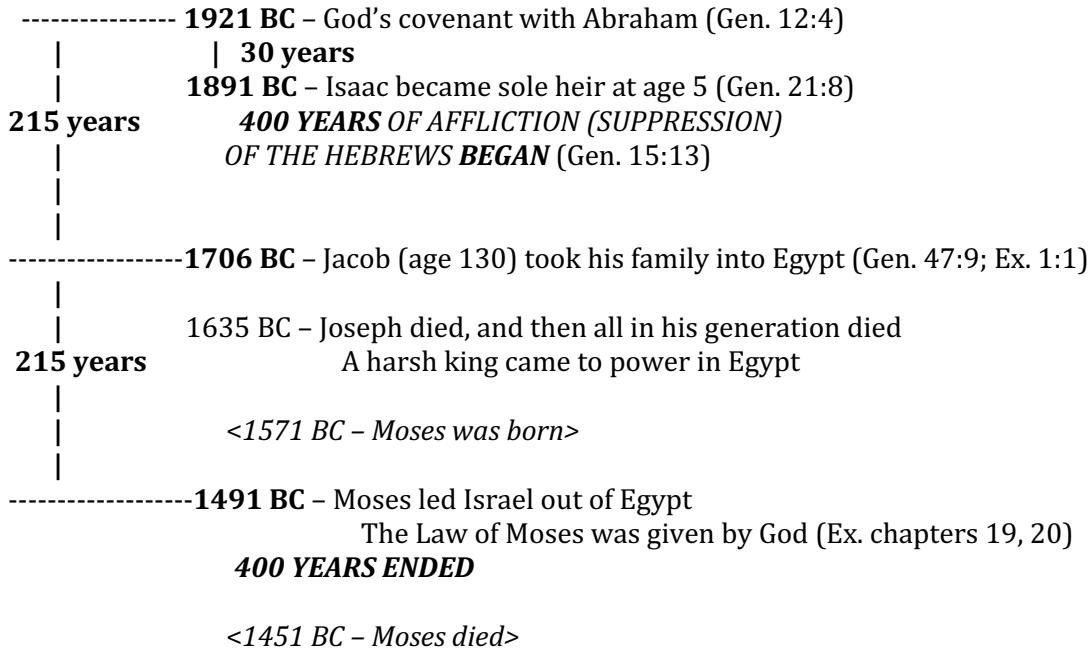
The Hebrews spent a total of 215 years in Egypt, from when Jacob went there with his family (1706 BC), until Moses led them out (1491 BC). Things were fine until Jacob and then eventually all his sons died (Ex. 1:6). The new king of Egypt enslaved them and tried to reduce their population. First, he tried to work them to death. When that did not work, he tried to get the Hebrews to kill their newborn baby boys – but of course that did not work, the Hebrews would not kill their children. Finally, the king of Egypt ordered his own people to kill the Hebrews' baby boys. All this time God multiplied the Hebrews greatly. (Ex. 1:6-22)

A good reference on all of this is the works of Floyd Nolan Jones [some of his books are for sale on Amazon.com, and he has a website with all his works available for free: nolanjonesministries.com]. Just remember to begin with the Bible. If we begin with the secular viewpoint, especially the Egyptologists, we will not find the truth.

430 years of affliction (suppression) of the Hebrews

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. Gal. 3:16-17

Timeline of the 430 years from God's covenant with Abraham to the giving of the Law of Moses:



Paul wrote about the 430 years from the Covenant of Abraham to the Law because he was writing to Jews who were trying to impose the Law on those who were free in Jesus under the everlasting covenant God made with Abraham for all who would believe. The 430 years is called "*sojourning*" in Ex. 12:40 where it is mentioned that Israel had lived in Egypt (but not for the whole 430 years).

The above chart pulls together a number of scriptures to show that the Hebrews were in Egypt only 215 years. There are other confirming scriptures, included the date when Solomon built the temple, which confirms these dates.

Lastly, the 400 years were from the time that Isaac became the official heir through whom would come the Nation of Israel. They were suppressed and sometimes oppressed. When Moses led them out of Egypt and the Law was given, the 400 years ended.

This is an overview. Much more information is on floydjonesministries.com.

A population explosion: READ Ex. 1:1-2, 7-9,20. Just how much did they multiply? When they left Egypt 80 years later, they approached 3 million. The number of fighting men and Levite males give us an idea of the total numbers. (Num. 1:46; 3:39).

Into this time of trouble Miriam was born.

Miriam's family READ Ex. 6:16,18,20

And the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, whom her mother bare to Levi in Egypt: and she bare unto Amram Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister. Num.26:59

From various scriptures, we learn that Miriam was the oldest, and Aaron was 3 years old when Moses was born (Ex. 7:7). Yet Moses became the leader and the head of the family. All 3 served the Lord for many years, especially during the 40 years in the wilderness.

1. Miriam as a little girl: An example of bravery and wisdom: READ Ex. 2:1-10

Moses' Mom hid Miriam's baby brother; this was the only way to save him. When the time came, Mom couldn't go herself, she would be noticed. So she sent Miriam, still a little girl.

Miriam, just a little girl, waited, spoke and acted wisely.

Success! God's plan went forward.

Note that there was much bravery on the part of Miriam and the princess. Pharaoh's daughter, as an Egyptian, was supposed to kill any baby Hebrew boy she saw. Yet God put it on her heart to take him in as her own, and thereby protected Miriam as well.

A long break: What happened as the years passed? By the time they left Egypt she would have been in her 80's or 90's. She must have been maturing as a leader as part of an important Levite family.

She never married as far as we know. It was very difficult and dangerous times, and perhaps life was not turning out like she thought it would. Today women without a husband can feel the same lack. Yet God told us that He is our husband. For me, the following verse applies to widows, and also to other women without a husband:

For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. Is. 54:5

2. Miriam as a prophetess: Example of strong and godly leadership: READ Ex. 15:20-21

A prophet or prophetess is someone who speaks for God and is also a leader in some way. Miriam certainly spoke for (and to) God in song, and she led the women in singing to the Lord. What a joyous time. Micah 6:4 says she helped lead the people out of Egypt, and this was the high point of her ministry.

Her brother Moses was the great leader to whom God spoke "mouth to mouth"; Aaron was the High Priest; and Miriam was the prophetess who led the women. She heard from God to be able to speak for Him, but not in the same way as Moses.

Miriam was the first woman singer in the Bible. What a glorious time.

What happened?

3. A caution that warns against presumption: READ Num. 12:1-16

The large nation of Israel had been in the wilderness long enough to receive great blessings – miracle provisions, the giving of the Law, and great leadership. They also had been very rebellious at times – Aaron’s golden calf, and repeated complaining and rebellions. So, we have a huge mass of restless people being led by Moses. Some commentators think that Miriam and Aaron were worried about Moses’ leadership weakening. Miriam must have been the instigator of the challenge to Moses because God judged her. Aaron just went along with her plan. Their problem with Moses seems to have been his marrying a foreigner.

Moses kept quiet; God dealt with it.

Obviously, the two were challenging Moses’ leadership and his speaking with God.

Why did Miriam change? Why did she do this? “A woman who overestimated herself.” Presumption = taking liberties, overstepping ones bounds. It is easier to fall into than we may think. David knew this. Psalm 19 records a beautiful description of the Word of God and how it ministers to us. *The law of the Lord is perfect* (v.7) ... then David asked the Lord the following:

*Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.
Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me:
then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.
Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight,
O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.
Ps. 19:12-14*

Somehow Miriam allowed presumptuous sins have dominion over her. And what is the “*great transgression*” here in this passage? It has much to do with rebellion. Presumption leads to rebellion.

Leadership is a spiritually dangerous place if the leader does not keep eyes on the Lord. It is so easy to overstep, to get one’s own ideas. An instruction in the New Testament touches on this:

My brethren, be not many masters [leaders, teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation [judgment]. – James 3:1

How serious was Miriam’s sin? *But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.* – Deut. 18:20

Miriam’s punishment would have brought a slow death. It showed God’s most serious judgment. (Num. 12:10-12)

Moses prayed and God healed Miriam. BUT she had to wait 7 days. So, this (1) was a public punishment for a public sin; (2) shamed her (v. 14); and (3) held up the whole nation for the 7 days.

Conclusion

There is nothing more in the Bible about Miriam’s life after this. She died in Kadesh not long before the nation entered the promised land.

Much more could be said. There are traditions about her (as there are about much of the ancient nation of Israel) – but we certainly have learned much from the Bible.

We learn from Miriam to use the gifts and talents that God gives us, keep our eyes on Jesus, and always beware of trying to take over things to run them the way we think best.

*Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.
Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp.
For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.
Psalm 149:1,3,4*