

Aaron and Miriam

'Amram took his Aunt Jochebed, his father's sister as his wife and she bore him Aaron, Moses (and Miriam)' (Exodus 6:20). 'Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter (descendant) of Levi who was born to Levi in Egypt and she bore to Amram, Aaron, Moses and Miriam their sister' (Numbers 26:59).

This Bible study is mainly about Miriam and Aaron. Moses will be frequently mentioned because he was the reason Aaron and Miriam were included in the Bible. Moses was the star of the family supported by Aaron and Miriam in his ministry. Without Moses, we may never have known about Aaron and Miriam. For information about Moses, see the Bible study on this website titled, 'Moses and the Israelites Were Real People'. Miriam, Aaron and Moses were unusually and extremely fit, healthy individuals. Their unusual and rare good health right into very old age would have been either genetic or supernatural. Aaron was three years older than Moses. Miriam was much older than both her brothers. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died yet his eyes were not dim nor his natural strength abated (Deuteronomy 34:7). Aaron was one hundred and twenty-three years old when he died after climbing to the top of Mount Hor (Numbers 33:39). Miriam topped her brothers. After the children of Israel had left Egypt, Miriam would have been in her mid nineties but was still able to sing and dance. 'Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron and Moses took a tambourine in her hand and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dances. Miriam sang, "Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider He has thrown into the sea"' (Exodus 15:20 & 21). They were in the wilderness for forty years so Miriam would have been about one hundred and thirty-five when she died.

The three children were born during the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt. We can work out by reading the scriptures how much older than Aaron and Moses, Miriam was. By faith and trust in God, Amram and Jochebed were not afraid of the Pharaoh's decree insisting all Hebrew baby boys were to be drowned at birth (Exodus 1:16 to 22; Hebrews 11:23). Although the Egyptian Pharaoh ordered all male babies be killed, it is obvious by reading the scriptures that order was ignored by the Hebrews. Without including the other eleven tribes, just the male Levites alone numbered 22,273 (Numbers 3:43) so clearly, there were thousands of males who had been infants who survived the Pharaoh's decree. When Moses was three months old, Jochebed could not hide him from the Egyptians any longer. She was desperate to save her newborn baby so she wove a basket of bulrushes and made it watertight by covering it with bitumen. She placed Moses in the basket and put it by the brink of the Nile river where she must have known the Pharaoh's daughter would go to bathe (Exodus 2:3). Moses' older sister Miriam hid, waited and watched over her baby brother (Exodus 2:4) although she must have been distressed when she heard the tiny baby crying piteously (Exodus 2:6) and it must have taken all her strength not to tend to him. When Pharaoh's daughter, a princess came down to bathe, she saw the little basket and told her maid to fetch it. This is an important note: that unnamed maid saved the life of the greatest prophet and servant of God this earth has ever had. When the princess opened the basket and saw the baby crying, she took pity on Moses when she realised he was a Hebrew child. Miriam, who had been watching all this time, offered to call a Hebrew nurse to look after Moses. When the princess said, "Go," Miriam called her mother who had been waiting and she must have been praying fervently. The princess then told Jochebed to nurse (her own) baby and she would be paid. For three years, Jochebed was paid to take care of her own son, whom the princess named Moses, an Egyptian name which means 'saved from water'. In Hebrew his name is Moshe. When Moses was weaned (at about three years old) he was handed over to the princess who adopted him and raised him as her own son (Exodus 2:5 to 10; Acts 7:21). It is often supposed Miriam was only about seven years old when Moses was born, but we can estimate Miriam's age by her actions when Moses was in the basket at age three months. Her actions were not that of a young child, but rather the wisdom, patience, courage, strength and boldness shown by Miriam in that frightening situation was that of a girl much older. Remember, this young lady went forward, all alone to speak to the tyrant's own daughter! It was the father of the princess herself, who had ordered the Hebrew baby boys be drowned. Miriam was certainly aware she putting herself at risk, because initially she stood a distance away, and had it all gone wrong, both Miriam and Moses could have been killed, and possibly the family too. Logically then, Miriam's courageous actions were not that of a young child, but those of an intelligent young adult of at least thirteen years of age or older, who did all she could to save her baby brother. Moses must have been able to have regular contact with his family because he grew up knowing he was Hebrew and he knew his family. 'By faith, when Moses had grown up, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing to share ill treatment with God's people, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a time' (Hebrews 11:24 & 25). Moses also spoke fluent Hebrew and when he wrote the first five books of the Bible, they were originally written in Hebrew.

Although Aaron was a Levite, his wife was from the tribe of Judah. Aaron married Elisheba, whose brother Nahshon was the leader of the tribe of Judah. 'Aaron took Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Nahshon as his wife and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar' (Exodus 6:23). 'The leader of the children of Judah will be Nahshon the son of Amminadab' (Numbers 2:3). Although Elisheba was from

Judah, their four sons were all considered to be Levites and they all became priests. Mary, Jesus' mother was related to John the Baptist's mother Elizabeth and was thus a Levite (Luke 1:36). When Jesus' parents Mary and Joseph married, their bloodlines were the opposite of Aaron and Elisheba; Mary was a Levite and Joseph was from Judah, and Jesus is called the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). 'It is evident our Lord Jesus has sprung out of Judah, about which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood (Hebrews 7:14). The assumption is, children are always given the ancestry of their fathers or stepfathers, regardless of what tribe their mothers come from.

Apart from the scriptures telling us about Miriam's bravery when she helped save Moses, there is no further mention of her until she is an elderly woman aged in her nineties. Miriam was considered to be as important as Aaron to the children of Israel as they helped them escape from slavery. 'I (the Lord) brought you up out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of bondage. I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam' (Micah 6:4). There is no mention of Aaron's childhood. The first time his name was recorded in scripture, he was already an elderly man of eighty-three and God had already called Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. In his great reluctance and lack of self-confidence, Moses tried several times to refuse to do the task God had called him to do. After pleading with the Lord several times to leave him out of it, the Lord became angry with Moses and said, "What about Aaron your brother, the Levite? I know he can speak well. Also, he is coming to meet you. When he sees you he will be glad in his heart. You will speak to him and put the words in his mouth. I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what to do. Aaron will be your spokesman to the people and it will happen, he will be to you a mouth, and you will be to him as God. Take this rod in your hand with which you will do signs" ... God said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." He went and met Moses on God's mountain and kissed him. Moses told Aaron everything God said and all the signs with which God had instructed him. Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. Aaron spoke all the words God had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. The people believed, and when they heard God had visited the children of Israel and had seen their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord God' (Exodus 4:14 to 17; 27 to 31). 'God said to Moses, "Behold, I have made you as God to Pharaoh and Aaron your brother will be your prophet. You will speak all I command you and Aaron your brother will speak to Pharaoh ... Moses was eighty and Aaron eighty-three years old when they first spoke to Pharaoh' (Exodus 7:1, 2 & 7).

Aaron's father Amram was one of four sons born to Kohath, the great grandson of Levi, the son of Jacob. The children of Israel had been in Egypt for 430 years. Each man down from Levi had lived for over one hundred years. 'These are the names of the sons (and grandsons) of Levi according to their generations; Gershon, Kohath and Merari. Levi lived one hundred and thirty-seven years ... The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. Kohath lived one hundred and thirty-three years ... Amram took his Aunt Jochebed his father's sister as his wife and she bore him Aaron, Moses and Miriam. Amram lived one hundred and thirty-seven years' (Exodus 6:16 to 20). Levi produced a family who became small tribes in their own right. 'From Kohath came the family of the Amramites, the family of the Izharites, the family of the Hebronites and the family of the Uzzielites. These are the families of the Kohathites (Numbers 3:27). The 'Amramites' were a very well known family so Moses, who grew up as an Egyptian prince would not have been out of place within his famous princely family. They became wealthy and produced good leaders.

Aaron and Miriam started off working with Moses very well but they did have some extraordinary troubles during the forty years they were travelling. They initially did all the right things. Aaron stood shoulder to shoulder with Moses during the challenges with Pharaoh and during the ten plagues. It was Aaron's rod that became a serpent and swallowed up all the serpents belonging to Pharaoh's magicians (Exodus 7:12). When Aaron stretched out his rod in Egypt the first three plagues came; blood, frogs and nasty, biting, blood sucking insects (Exodus 7:19; 8:5 & 6; 8:16 & 17). The Lord Himself sent the flies and the death of the livestock (Exodus 8:24; 9:6). Aaron and Moses together tossed ash into the air bringing the plague of boils (Exodus 9:8 to 10). Then Moses seemed to gain confidence and stretched out his own rod, bringing the plague of hail and storms that hit Egypt, then the locusts and then the thick darkness (Exodus 9:22 & 23; 10:12 & 13; 10:21 to 23). Aaron and Moses together told the elders to tell all the children of Israel about the Passover Lamb and what to do with it but the final plague of the death of the firstborn sons was done by the Lord Himself (Exodus 12:21 to 29). Once the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea, Miriam suddenly emerged singing, dancing and playing the tambourine (Exodus 15:20). When the children of Israel moaned to Moses about their troubles, Aaron remained supportive and obedient, even holding up Moses' arm during their battle and subsequent victory over the evil tribe of the Amalek (Exodus 16:2; 17:12). Aaron and the elders joined in the feast given for Moses' father-in-law Jethro (Exodus 18:12). Aaron, his two eldest sons and the seventy elders joined Moses on the mountain to worship God and had an amazing experience when they saw God Himself. 'Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel went up the mountain. They saw the God of Israel. Under His feet was like a paved work of sapphire stone, like the skies for clearness. God did not lay His hand on the nobles of the children of Israel. They saw God, and ate and

drank' (Exodus 24:9 to 11). When Moses and Joshua went up the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments written in stone by the finger of God, Aaron and Hur stayed with the children of Israel to be their leaders in Moses' place (Exodus 24:13 & 14; 31:18). Aaron was the chief priest and his four sons were promoted to high priests who were to wear exquisite clothing, covered in beautiful expensive jewels (Exodus 28:1 to 43). It was a privileged position and the foundations of a wonderful ministry.

During all this time, Aaron and Miriam did not do one thing wrong. It seems as though Aaron was doing well when Moses was with him but after Moses' departure up the mountain, Aaron showed his weakness and his inclination to be easily influenced and was waylaid. After all God had told him, after being given jewel encrusted garments and a privileged position of priesthood, Aaron bowed to the demands of the people and took their gold to make the idolatrous golden calf. 'When the people saw Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, they gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us gods to go before us, for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." Aaron said to them, "Take off the golden rings in the ears of your wives, your sons and your daughters and bring them to me." All the people took off the golden rings in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He received what they handed him and fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molten calf. They said, "These are your gods Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt." When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it and Aaron made a proclamation saying, "Tomorrow will be a feast to God." They rose up early on the next day and offered burnt offerings, they brought peace offerings and the people sat down to eat and to drink then rose up to play' (Exodus 32:1 to 6). They danced, sang, feasted, played and made a lot of noise. Joshua was with Moses when they came down the mountain and when he heard the noise of the partying, Joshua thought they were at war (Exodus 32:17 & 18). Moses was shocked when he saw what Aaron had done and asked what the people had done to him to persuade him to sin, which was another indication Aaron was easily influenced or persuaded. Then Aaron lied the most stupid lie but it was probably out of fear. 'Moses said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you have brought a great sin on them?" Aaron answered, "Do not let your anger grow hot. You know the people are set on evil for they said to me, "Make us gods to go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." I said to them, "Whoever has any gold let them take it off," so they gave it to me and I threw it into the fire and out came this calf." (That was Aaron's stupid lie.) Moses saw the people had broken loose, for Aaron had let them loose for a derision among their enemies' (Exodus 32:21 to 25).

Because of this great sin of idolatry, the Lord intended to kill every one of the Israelites leaving only Moses alive to continue the Hebrew line of the chosen race. 'The Lord was very angry with Aaron and wanted to destroy him and Moses prayed for Aaron at the time' (Deuteronomy 9:20). Moses pleaded with God not to destroy all the Israelites and asked Him to forgive their great sin (Exodus 32:7 to 14; 34:9). Moses called for anyone who had not sinned by worshipping the calf and only some Levites came to him. Moses instructed the Levites to kill the men who had done this wicked thing and three thousand men were put to death by the sword (Exodus 32:26 to 35). We do not know exactly how long it took for the Lord to stop being angry with Aaron and the Israelites but we can estimate it would have been a couple of months. The Lord told the Israelites to remove all their finery then told them off once again and said if He were to come down to be amongst them He would consume them. God was really furious with them. Then there was a long conversation between Moses and the Lord (Exodus 33:1 to 23) before Moses returned to the mountain for another six weeks and when he walked back down the mountain glowing with the presence of the Lord, his face shone and that frightened Aaron and all the Israelites (Exodus 34:28 to 35). Although they saw the error of their ways, it took some time before they were comfortable with God again. There were serious consequences for what they did. Not one of those who had worshipped the golden calf entered the Promised Land. Although what Aaron did was sinful and foolish, we cannot point our finger at him or the Israelites because we all sin and do foolish things sometimes.

Aaron was restored to his priestly ministry after his mistake. He was by Moses' side when the Lord gave the more than six hundred Laws of Moses as written in the Book of Leviticus. Aaron helped Moses take the first two census' ever recorded in the Bible (Exodus 30:12; Numbers 1:2). When Aaron's two eldest sons Nadab and Abihu sinned by offering 'strange' fire to the Lord, Aaron was shocked to silence when they suddenly died. After that Aaron made sure his two younger sons did not make the same mistake and went with them when they ministered to the Lord as priests. 'Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron each took his censer, put fire in it and laid incense on it, and offered strange fire before the Lord when He had not commanded them to. Fire came forth from before the Lord and devoured them and they died before the Lord. Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke of when He said, 'I will show Myself holy to those who come near Me and before all the people I will be glorified.'" Aaron held his peace' (Leviticus 10:1 to 3). 'Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord when they offered strange fire before Him in the wilderness of Sinai and they had no children. Eleazar and Ithamar ministered in the priest's office in the presence of Aaron their father' (Numbers 3:4). Aaron was making sure his younger sons did not fall into sin and die. Eleazar was promoted to prince of

the princes of all the Levites (Numbers 3:32). This was the time when the Lord introduced cash offerings to be given to the priests (Numbers 3:48), a custom still practiced today.

Miriam is not mentioned for some time but the next time she is mentioned, she is in trouble for sin. It seems Moses' Midianite wife Zipporah died and he married a dark skinned Ethiopian woman. Moses was a wise man and would have married a woman who could support his difficult ministry, and it appears Miriam and Aaron were jealous of her. Miriam and Aaron did not approve and their criticism brought down the wrath of God. 'Miriam and Aaron criticised Moses because of the Cushite (Ethiopian) woman he married. They said, "Has God only spoken with Moses? Has He not spoken also with us?" God heard what they said. Moses was very humble, above all the men who were on the earth. God spoke suddenly to Moses, Aaron and Miriam. "Come, you three to the Tent of Meeting." The three came. God came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the door of the Tent and called Aaron and Miriam. They both came forth. God said, "Listen to My words. If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make Myself known to him in a vision and I will speak with him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so. He is faithful in all My house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, openly and not in parables, and the form of the Lord he will see. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" The anger of the Lord was kindled against them and He departed. The cloud removed from over the Tent and behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. Aaron looked at Miriam and behold, she was leprous! Aaron said to Moses, "Oh my lord, please do not lay sin on us, for we have done foolishly and we have sinned. Let her not, I pray, be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb." Moses cried to the Lord saying, "Heal her, God I beg you." The Lord answered Moses, "If her father had spat in her face, would she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut up outside of the camp seven days and after that she shall be brought in again." Miriam was shut up outside of the camp for seven days' (Numbers 12:1 to 15). Why Miriam was severely punished and not Aaron when they did exactly the same thing is unclear. Perhaps she was leading the criticism. If that is right, then once again Aaron showed his weakness and inclination to be easily influenced. It is interesting to note, when Miriam complained about the dark skinned Ethiopian woman and the Lord disciplined her, He made her skin as white as snow, giving a very strong message. God does not care about the colour of the skin, He looks at the heart attitude. Truly, 'Man looks at the outward appearance (including skin colour) but God looks at the heart' (1 Samuel 16:7).

Aaron learned his lesson though and when the children of Israel started criticising Moses again, this time, Aaron stood up for him and risked being stoned by the very people they had led out of slavery. They actually wanted to return to Egypt and go back into slavery. Once again the Lord said He wanted to destroy all the children of Israel and once again Moses pleaded for their lives and asked the Lord to forgive them. The Lord relented but swore none of the children of Israel would enter the Promised Land except Caleb and Joshua causing the people to mourn greatly. They knew they were close to the Promised Land and many went to the mountain to cross into the land in defiance of the Lord's command and there, all those who had gone up the mountain were killed by the Amaleks (Numbers 14:1 to 45).

A few men of Israel came up against Aaron and Moses again when the men assumed Aaron and Moses were exalting themselves. This could have been due to jealousy because if we study their names we will see they were Moses and Aaron's cousins. 'The men assembled themselves together against Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You take too much on yourselves, seeing all the congregation are holy, everyone of them and God is among them so why then lift yourselves up above the assembly of God? ... Must you make yourself a prince over us? ... Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards" (Numbers 16:3, 13 & 14). This time God's judgement was different. The earth split apart and swallowed up all the troublemakers along with their families, households and all their goods. They went down to hell alive and screaming then the earth closed over them. The surviving Israelites were terrified at their screams and ran for their lives, then fire came up and devoured the remaining two hundred and fifty Levites who had criticised Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16:28 to 35). The very next day the survivors criticised Aaron and Moses again because of the deaths of the Levites. In judgement for their criticism the Lord killed a further 14,700 people (Numbers 16:41 & 49). The children of Israel were terrified at the latest judgement. 'The children of Israel spoke to Moses saying, "Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone. Will we all perish?" (Numbers 17:12 & 13). Aaron returned to his duties as a priest to the Lord then soon afterward, Miriam died. 'The children of Israel, the whole congregation came into the wilderness of Zin and the people lived in Kadesh. Miriam died and was buried there' (Numbers 20:1).

Then something supernatural happened. God said to Moses, "Take the rod and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother and speak to the rock before their eyes so it gives forth its water. You will bring forth to them water out of the rock so you will give the congregation and their livestock water to drink." Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him. Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock and he said to them, "Hear now you rebels. Will we bring you water out of this rock?" Moses

lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice and water came forth abundantly. The congregation and their livestock drank. God said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, you will not bring this assembly into the land I have given them" (Numbers 20:8 to 12). That mistake cost Moses and Aaron dearly. They would never enter the Promised Land. Why was this judgement on those two men so severe after all they had achieved? Their dream was to enter the Promised Land. The answer lies in the Bible. Moses said, "We will bring forth water out of this rock," indicating it was Moses himself who was the man to save them. They had missed the point entirely and missed the opportunity to sanctify God in the eyes of the Israelites. By hitting the rock they made it look like they had some kind of magical powers when it was actually the Lord's doing. Moses and Aaron knew it was God's miracle they were taking part in but they missed the opportunity to demonstrate the power of God. That is why the Lord said, "You have not believed in Me to sanctify Me before the children of Israel." We should understand is exactly what that special rock was. 'I would not have you ignorant brothers, our fathers were all under the spiritual cloud (symbolic of the Holy Spirit), all passed through the Red Sea and were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. All ate the same spiritual food (manna – bread from heaven) and all drank the same spiritual drink. They drank of a spiritual rock that followed them and the Rock was Jesus' (1 Corinthians 10:1 to 4). By striking the rock instead of speaking to it, Moses symbolically struck Jesus causing the Lord's anger and thus denying Aaron and Moses entry into the Promised Land. A few centuries later Jesus confirmed He was the source of Living Water. 'Jesus said, "If you knew the gift of God and Who it is Who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him and He would have given you Living Water ... Whoever drinks of the water I will give them will never thirst again but the water I will give will become well of water springing up to eternal life" (John 4:10 & 14).

Not long after Miriam died, Aaron also died. 'The children of Israel travelled from Kadesh (where Miriam had died). The whole congregation came to Mount Hor. The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom saying, "Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will not enter into the land I have given to the children of Israel because you rebelled against My Word at the waters of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son and bring them up to Mount Hor and place Aaron's garments on Eleazar his son. Aaron will die there." Moses did as the Lord commanded. They went up Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. Moses put Aaron's garments on Eleazar his son and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. When all the congregation, all the house of Israel saw Aaron was dead they wept for Aaron thirty days' (Numbers 20:22 to 29).

Aaron had the privilege of being the very first chief priest and high priest, called to help Moses lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and freeing them from slavery, gathering together a holy, chosen race of people (Deuteronomy 7:6) to whom our Saviour and Messiah Jesus would be born. 'Nobody takes this honour on themselves but are called by God just like Aaron was' (Hebrews 5:4). Hundreds of years later, another remarkable man, John the Baptist, a Levite and descendent of Aaron was born to pave the way for Messiah Jesus. John was blood relative of Jesus through Mary and Elizabeth. Jesus is our High Priest, leading us out of spiritual slavery, gathering together another holy, chosen race (1 Peter 2:9). Unlike Aaron who died, Jesus will never die. 'The main point is this; we have a High Priest Who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens' (Hebrews 8:1).

Amen and God bless you.

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