

## Week 5 – Miriam

**Group Connect:** choose 1 *Connect* question and discuss for 5-7 minutes.

- Describe the last beautiful thing you saw that made you pause, that surprised you.
- Share one thing you have experienced that was hard/painful/unpleasant but was good for you.

**Read these passages aloud:**

**Exodus 15:20-21**

**Numbers 12:1-16**

*For context: in the Exodus passage, the Israelites have just escaped from Egypt after God's last plague on Egypt that killed the firstborn of humans and animals.<sup>1</sup> After the death of his firstborn, Pharaoh tells Moses and Aaron and the people of Israel to take their flocks and to go worship the LORD. But Pharaoh's army pursues them, and when they cross the Red Sea, the army is drowned. On the other side of the sea, the Israelites sang praises to God, dancing and singing. Miriam leads a song here in the Exodus passage.*

**Engage the texts as a group:**

1. What do you **observe** in the texts?
  - Who is Miriam? How is she described in Exodus and then in Numbers?
  - What is happening in each text? What is Miriam doing in Exodus? What is Miriam doing in Numbers? What is the nature of the dispute between Moses, Miriam and Aaron? What did Miriam and Aaron do/say? What does the LORD do?
2. What **questions** do you have of the passages?
  - What is the nature of the dispute between Moses, and Miriam and Aaron?
  - Why is Miriam struck with leprosy and not Aaron, too? Why is only Miriam punished?
  - Why are the words of the LORD so harsh? Why does the LORD punish Miriam so severely? Is it because she's a woman?
  - What is this text about exactly?

### **Why does Miriam matter?**

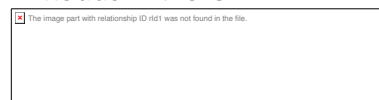
Miriam and the narratives depicting her matter because she too, is a servant of the LORD who is used by God to lead the Israelites. Miriam is the sister of Moses and Aaron, a leader among the people of Israel, and one who played an important role in the narrative of the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt into the wilderness.

In the Numbers narrative, we see the interplay between the three siblings with the LORD acting as a mediating parent when Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses.

When we read Numbers 12 in isolation, it can be more confusing than anything else. But, if we go back just one chapter to Numbers 11, we see how the people in the wilderness had been complaining and grumbling against God that they wanted meat to eat, and how they missed their life in Egypt (they forgot how they were enslaved—they're deceiving themselves). The LORD becomes angry at their

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 12:29-32



grumbling, and Moses gets impatient with having to bear them, and the LORD provides elders to help Moses bear the burden of leading these people. Then, next comes Miriam and Aaron speaking against Moses, and here too, the LORD is angry with their behavior.

It may be confusing why only Miriam is punished with skin blemishes that result in her being shut out of the community for seven days and not Aaron, too; but, when we look at Aaron's response of pleading to his younger brother, Moses, asking him to pray for them for God to heal Miriam, you see the anguish and distress in this familial sibling drama. Aaron suffers too, but in a different way.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it is a case of the oldest (Miriam) bearing the punishment for a younger sibling, as well.

This story shows how seriously God takes the lack of trust and grumbling against God and the ones appointed by God (in this case, Moses); and how sin affects more than the individual. The community would not move on and leave Miriam behind, so they must wait until her cleansing is done after the seven days.

**Put this Bible story in one sentence:**

"In this story, God \_\_\_\_\_."

**HOW DOES MIRIAM POINT US TO JESUS?**

This story tells of how Miriam and Aaron's sin and God's response to them.

When we sin, there are consequences, whether we want to acknowledge them or not. God takes sin seriously, even if we don't always. Jesus, the only person ever to have lived without sin, nonetheless, took on our sin, bearing the shame and separation caused by sin, for the sake of restoring us to a right relationship with God. We are no longer condemned by our sin, nor sent out from the presence of God because of our sin. Jesus' three days in the grave is like Miriam's seven days shut out of the community; after three days, Jesus was raised from the dead and restored us to right relationship with God, just as Miriam was brought back in and restored to the community after seven days. There was shame in being blemished and in being sent out and separated. Jesus has borne the ultimate shame; he took on all our blemishes of sin onto himself, onto his own body to the point of death. But through *his* separation, he grants *us* connection and restoration to God again through his death and resurrection. Praise Jesus.

**So, what now?**

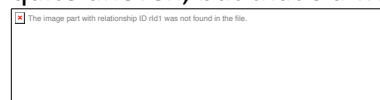
- Name some specific situations in life where sin has affected the way you communicate and relate to others. Sin complicates community – so, who do you need to forgive (or from whom do you need to seek forgiveness)?
- What are some troubling ways we have viewed God? Things we have believed about God and God's character that aren't good?
- What disposition of the heart are you maintaining right now?

**Close in prayer:**

What are some troubling ways we have viewed God? Pray about this to God. Ask God to give us truthful, clear understandings and belief in God as good, just, righteous, and loving.

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<sup>2</sup> This is hard to digest. It doesn't mean Miriam and Aaron's sufferings are equal—it still looks quite uneven, but that's a wrestling with the text we may have always.



E.g.) *God our creator, we confess how we forget you—what you have done for us, how you are changing us for our good, how you are at work in the world. When we are stressed or afraid, we crave and long for the things of the past, forgetting how they consumed our lives. Forgive us, Lord. Give us clear eyes to see and behold how you are doing a new thing in and amongst us by your Spirit. Teach us to love what you love and form our hearts. Help us to confess our sin and to encourage one another in faithful living day by day. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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