

Women in the Bible

This is the first of a year-long series and we thank Beverly Whitaker for permission to publish her work. Each character is revealed through a first-person account of their life and experiences.

Because it was men who dominated cultural and religious life in the ancient world, and still to a some degree today, the role of women in the great biblical stories has often been lost or played down. When you look more closely, it is possible to identify clues which reveal what a big part women played in the well-known stories. On reflection, it is obvious and inevitable that women should be essential to the action as they are to any human experience, and we will try and recapture something of their centrality in this series.

We will draw on characters from the Old and New Testaments.

We start with an Old Testament character, Miriam, who hid Moses in the bulrushes near the river Nile to evade Pharaoh's edict that all new-born Hebrew boys should all be killed. It would be a good idea to use the biblical references as a starting point and then read what each character speaks, as written by the author Beverly Whitaker.

Miriam

Bible References: Exodus 15:20, 2 – Numbers 12 – Numbers 20:1 – Numbers 26:59 – Deut. 24:9 – I Chron. 6:3 – Micah 6:4



Pharaoh's daughter adopts the baby Moses

I am grateful to my youngest brother, (Moses) for it was he who interceded with God after I was struck with leprosy. I had held a grudge against him, he whom I had once protected. But he forgave my acts against him, and asked God to heal me. He acted toward me in a spirit of love. In accordance with the regulations of the Israelites, I was shut out of camp for seven days, but I wasn't shut out of their hearts. They welcomed me back. And, yes, God healed me.



"Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously"
Drawing by James Tissot

But perhaps you would like to hear the rest of my story, and why I was in conflict with my younger brother. You see, I occupied a unique place among the Hebrew women, that of prophetess. The Hebrew word "prophetess" means a woman who is inspired to teach the will of God, and the term is also applied sometimes to a singer of hymns. At the parting of the Sea of Reeds, I led the Hebrew women across the dry sea bottom. And when we were safely delivered, I played on a timbrel and danced and led the women in song, (Exodus 15:21).

I was proud to be a leader among the women, and also being older than my brother, I was rebellious at taking a secondary place to him. Moreover, I thought he was wrong to have taken a wife from an idolatrous country. And I wasn't alone in my thinking. We have another brother; (Aaron) he's just a few years younger than me. He joined me speaking out against our younger brother, and for our words and actions, God called us out, and showed anger against us (Numbers 12). That's when I was struck with leprosy. We were wandering in the Wilderness, eager to find the Promised Land.

I am grateful that God chose to limit my punishment to seven days in exile, and that my people did not forsake me; they didn't break camp. They waited for me. But now so many years later, we still wander in the Wilderness. Will I not reach the Promised Land? And what of my brothers? Will they?



Miriam's younger brother Moses



Various ancient musical instruments

Next month – Deborah.