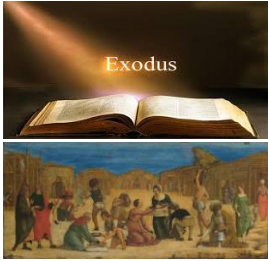


Cork Scripture Group

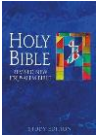
Women of Exodus



1

Context: Exodus

- 1-15 Liberation from Egypt
- 15-18 Journey through the Desert
- 19-24 Covenant on Sinai
- 25-31 Instructions on the Sanctuary
- 32-34 Golden Calf & Renewal of the Covenant
- 35-40 Furnishing & Building of the Sanctuary




4

Opening Prayer
(based on Exodus 13:21-22)

Ever present God,
You accompanied your people Israel,
a cloud by day and a flame by night.
Be for us our guide and courage, our wisdom and
inspiration.
So that the ways we travel will lead always and only to you.
Through Jesus our brother,
Amen.

2



The Context:
Exodus 1:6-12

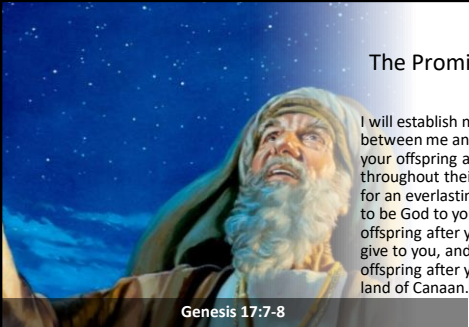
James Tissot, Pharaoh orders the imprisonment of the Jewish people

5

The Promise?

I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you... all the land of Canaan.

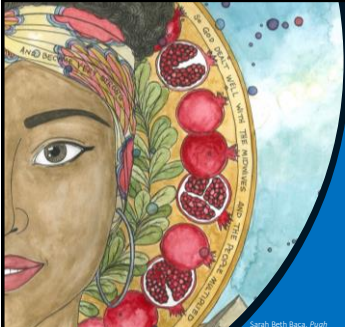
Genesis 17:7-8



3

Text A:
Exodus 1:15-22

What do we learn about Shiphrah and Puah?



Sarah Beth Baca, Puah

6

Hebrew midwives/ midwives to the Hebrews

- LXX (Greek) - ταῖς μαίαις τῶν Εβραίων - of the Hebrews
- Vulgate (Latin) - obstetricibus Hebraeorum – of the Hebrews
- Hebrew? Egyptian?
- Proselytes?
- Does it matter?

7



Relief from Temple at Armant in Egypt

10

Names: Shiphrah & Puah

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| • Shiphrah | • Puah |
| • שִׁפְרָה | • פּוּעָה |
| • Semitic | • Canaanite name |
| • Beautiful | • Lass, girl |
| • Genesis 49:21 | • Fragrant blossom |
- 'Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns.'

8

Two aspects of fearing God

• Exodus 1:17

But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.

• Exodus 1:21

And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

11

The midwives – working alone or together?

• Genesis 35:17

When she [Rachel] was in her difficult labour, the midwife said to her, 'Do not be afraid; for now you will have another son.'

• Genesis 38:28

While she [Tamar] was in labour, one put out a hand; and the midwife took and bound on his hand a crimson thread, saying, 'This one came out first.'

9

Fearing God

• Leviticus 19:14

You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling-block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

"Fearing God" reflects an action which derives from fear, or awe, and not the emotion itself.

- *The Jewish Study Bible*

Fear of = Trust in

- Terence E. Fretheim

12



13

Only woman named in Exodus 2



- **Exodus 2:21**

The priest of Midian ... gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage.

Sandro Botticelli, *The Youth of Moses* (detail)

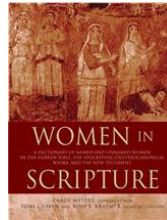
16

Importance of Shiphrah and Puah?

- Non-violent resistance is possible
 - Commentary on *Biblical Women: Signposts to the Kingdom of God*
- History's first recorded act of civil disobedience in defence of a moral imperative.
 - Nahum M. Sarna
- In the refusal of women to cooperate with oppression, the liberation of Israel from bondage has its beginnings.
 - J. Cheryl Exum

14

Named & unnamed individuals in the Bible



- *Named individuals*
Men: 2,900 Women: 170
- *Women in Scripture:*
Named women: 132 pages
Unnamed women: 332 pages
- *Different Studies:*
Women's names: 5.5/8% of total

17

THE WOMEN OF EXODUS 2

- Exodus 2:1 *A Levite woman; Exodus 2:8 The child's mother*
- Exodus 2: 4 *his sister*
- Exodus 2:5 *The daughter of Pharaoh*
- Exodus 2:5 *Her attendants ... her maid*
- Exodus 2:16 *The priest of Midian had seven daughters*

15



Moses' mother

- Not named in Exodus 2
- Father not named either
- First named Exodus 6:20
- later – Numbers 26:59
- Jochebed

Simeon Solomon, *The Mother of Moses*

18

Moses' mother

• **Exodus 2:2**

The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months.

“that he was a fine baby”: כִּי־טוֹב (kee tove)

Literally: *that he was good*

• **Genesis 1:4**

And God saw that the light was good: כִּי־טוֹב

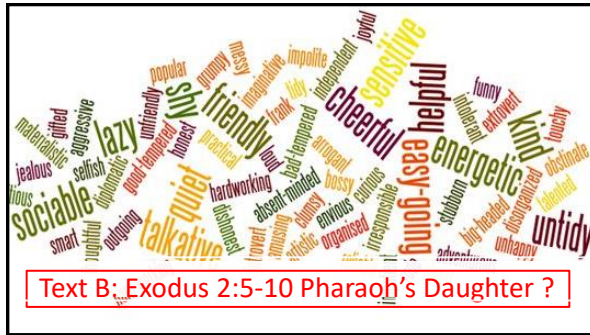


19

Pharaoh's daughter

- Unnamed daughter of an unnamed father
- Hebrew slave-child's foster mother
- An independent thinker
- Defies her father's order to kill all new-born Hebrew males
- An ally of the Hebrew people
- A deliverer of the one who delivers God's people from slavery

22



20

Moses – named by a nameless princess

- Acknowledges the baby's Hebrew origin
- She knew some Hebrew
- Root: מָשָׂה *mashaw*: draw out
- BUT Egyptian name – give birth
- Cf. Rameses – (The god) Ra gave birth (to this child) i.e. son of Ra
- Hebrew explanation added by later editor
 - ? aware of the name's origins, to bolster Moses' Hebrew identity.
 - ? Baffled by the Egyptian name and added the Hebrew explanation

23

Questions to ponder re Pharaoh's Daughter (Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*)

- How old is she?
- Is she married or single?
- Has she other children or is she infertile?
- Has she siblings?
- What was her relationship with her father like?
- Did he know that she was fostering a Hebrew child?
- Did she publicly differ from her father on his treatment of the Hebrew women, men, and their children?
- Was she a beloved and indulged daughter?
- Or was she one of so many children by so many women that he could not keep them straight?

21



Pharaoh's daughter's influence on Moses?

- **Exodus 2:19** (Daughters of priest of Midian): “An Egyptian helped us”
- Born as a Hebrew slave, raised as an Egyptian prince, and sojourned as a Midianite shepherd, his diverse experiences enriched his life and shaped his transcultural perspective. ...
- this hybridity qualifies him as a leader who could stand up against the Pharaoh

Sonia Kwok Wong

24

Miriam saves Moses

Exodus 2:1-2, 4

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ²The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. ...

⁴His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

25

Miriam (Part 2)

- 2 Early Life of Moses*
- 2-7 Call of Moses
- 7-11 Plagues of Egypt
- 12- 13 Passover
- 13-15 Departure from Egypt*

Numbers
12; 20

28

Miriam saves Moses

• Exodus 2:7-8

Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?' Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Yes.' So the girl went and called the child's mother.

- **Numbers 26:59:** Jochebed daughter of Levi ... bore to Amram: Aaron, Moses, and their sister Miriam.
- מלמָה (*almah*) = woman of marriageable age

26

TEXT C Exodus 15:1-21*

What picture of God is presented here?

29

The young Miriam

Model of discretion and timing, the sister negotiates, mediates and leads. She initiates the plan that delivers her brother.

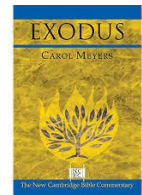
Humanly speaking, the Exodus story owes its beginnings not to Moses but to Miriam and the other women.

Phyllis Tribbe



27

Carol
Meyers



Carol Meyers, *Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

30

Exodus 15:1-21 - Song of the Sea

- A poetic tribute to Israel's miraculous deliverance from the pursuing Egyptians
- A very ancient poem (one of the oldest poems in the Bible)
- Much older than the preceding prose account of the Israelites' escape
- Written in Archaic Biblical Hebrew
- Echoes form and content of ancient Near Eastern literature
- Cf. Baal, a Canaanite storm god, defeats sea and river gods.

31

(NRSV) Song of Moses; Song of Miriam

The Song of Moses

Exodus 15:1-18

19 When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

The Song of Miriam

Exodus 15:20-21

34

Song of the Sea

- The Lord depicted as a warrior god
- Makes his people victorious over the Egyptians & deters other enemies
- Focus 1 – on God's cosmic power in charge of and in control of all creation
- Focus 2 - God's steadfast love as he leads his people to victory at the sea and from the sea to the "holy abode"
- "The Lord will reign forever and ever."



32

Structure highlights Moses

- PROSE INTRODUCTION Exodus 15:1
- POETRY Exodus 15:1-18
- PROSE SUMMARY Exodus 15:19
- PROSE INTRODUCTION Exodus 15:20-21
- POETRY Exodus 15:21



Gustave Moreau, Moses

35

Song of the Sea

Like all victory songs

- Involves unexpected victories of unarmed, underequipped or otherwise disadvantaged Israelites
- Victory due to the intervention of God in human affairs

33

Miriam's antiphonal response

- **Exodus 15:1-19**

¹ Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:
'I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. ...

- **Exodus 15:21**

²¹ And Miriam sang to them:
'Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.'

36




Miriam's chorus

- A faint echo of Moses' longer song
- Miriam - a kind of back-up vocalist to Moses' lead vocals

Rabbi Wendy Zierler

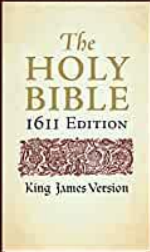
37



Phyllis Trible: *Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows*

By comparison [with Moses] her performance seems deficient, as does this entire small unit that awkwardly follows the grand Mosaic ending. It is anti-climactic, no more than an afterthought, a token of the female presence.

40



Translations of Exodus 15:21

King James Bible "And Miriam **answered** them..."

עָנָה *anah* – answer → response

- But Numbers 21:17: "Israel **sang**"
- LXX (Greek) "led them in song"
- Not an antiphonal answer but her own song?
- NRSV – "sang"; JSB – "chanted"

38

Song of Miriam – ancient & authoritative

The Mosaic conclusion so overpowers the Miriamic as to raise the question of why the latter ever survived.

[Scholarly answers] hold that the very retention of a Miriamic ending, in the presence of a Mosaic avalanche, argues both for its antiquity and authority. So tenacious was the tradition about Miriam that later editors could not eliminate it altogether.

41

Is it Moses' Song?

- Prose introduction – "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song" [not Moses alone]
- But the poem begins – "I will sing"
- "this song" – NOT "his song" or "Moses' song"
- Biblical text itself seems not so clear about attribution.

39

Song transferred to Moses

Later, redactors (editors) who were intent on elevating Moses took the song right out of her mouth and gave it to him – to Moses, the inarticulate one – in company with the sons of Israel.

- Phyllis Trible

- **Exodus 4:10**
But Moses said to the Lord, 'O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.'

42

Victory songs are led by women

- Genre of Song of the Sea – Victory Song celebrating victory in battle
- In a world with men as the primary combatants, the women who remain behind typically are the ones to greet triumphant soldiers returning from battle. (Carol Meyers)
- Composing and performing songs of triumph - a genre associated exclusively with women in ancient Israel.
- Characterized by 3 elements: Song - Dance - Drumming

43



Jephthah's daughter

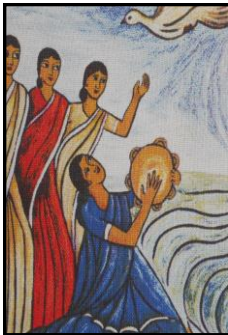
Judges 11:34

(After Jephthah defeated the Ammonites)

Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and there was his daughter coming out to meet him with **timbrels** and with **dancing**.

James Tissot, *Jephthah's Daughter*

46



Miriam

Exodus 15:20

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with **tambourines** and with **dancing**. And Miriam **sang** to them:

44



Israelite Women

1 Samuel 18:6

As they were coming home, when David returned from killing the Philistine, the women came out of all the towns of Israel, **singing** and **dancing**, to meet King Saul, with **tambourines**, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments.

Matteo Rosselli, *The triumphant David* (detail)

47



Deborah

Judges 5.1

The Song of Deborah

Then Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam **sang** on that day, saying:

St Mary's, Clapham

45

תוף Tofe

- **Exodus 15:20** (Miriam)
Tambourine
- **1 Samuel 18:6** (Israelite Women)
tambourines
- **Judges 11:34** (Jephthah's daughter)
timbrels



Hand Drum
(a small hand-held frame drum)

48



49

Miriam the Theologian

The Song of the Sea, as one of the earliest theological statements in the Hebrew Bible, ... is arguably a contribution of female creativity.

- Carol Meyers

52

Song of Miriam (Dead Sea Scrolls)

Qumran Cave 4

- Manuscript 4Q365
- 7 incomplete lines of a song by Miriam
- Composition independent of Moses
- Tradition of songs by Miriam

50

The prophet Miriam

Exodus 15:20-21

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; And Miriam sang to them:
 'Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
 horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.'

- לָהֶם *la-hem* to them: masculine plural

Deborah

53

Song of the Sea = Song of Miriam

Not a antiphon
– her own
song

Weakly linked
to Moses

Preserved as
Miriam's
creation

Victory songs
composed and
sung by women

Miriam's Dead
Sea hymn

51

Miriam/The Women of Exodus

- The mediator has become percussionist, lyricist, vocalist, prophet, leader and theologian.
- Like the beginning, the ending of the Exodus story belongs to women. They are the alpha and omega, the aleph and tau of deliverance.

- Phyllis Tribble

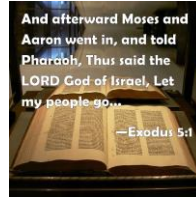
54

Story of Exodus - foundational to the Jewish Faith

- A foundational collective memory
 - How the nation of Israel came to be
 - How the name of God was revealed to them
 - The role of the covenant and the law in their understanding of their relationship with God
- Perhaps told from the experience of Exile in Babylon
- Passover still celebrated as an ancient annual family festival in memory of the exodus

55

Inspiration of Liberation Theology




Exodus:

- a model for the liberation of the poor of Latin America
- from oppression
 - capitalism
 - the ruling class

58

Easter Proclamation

Exsultet



Exsultet – Easter Vigil

These, then, are the feasts of Passover, in which is slain the Lamb, the one true Lamb, whose Blood anoints the doorposts of believers.

This is the night, when once you led our forebears, Israel's children, from slavery in Egypt and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea.

56

Exodus - Relived in Prayer & Reminded by the Prophets

Psalm 77:19-20

Your way was through the sea,
your path, through the mighty
waters;
yet your footprints were unseen.
You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Micah 6:4

For I brought you up from
the land of Egypt,
and redeemed you from the
house of slavery;
and I sent before you
Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

59

Formed by the Exodus experience

- **Deuteronomy 10:19**
You shall also love the stranger,
for you were strangers in the land
of Egypt.
- **Deuteronomy 15:13, 15**
when you send a male slave out
from you a free person, you shall
not send him out empty-handed.
- **Deuteronomy 23:7**
You shall not abhor any of the
Egyptians, because you were an
alien residing in their land.
- Remember that you were a
slave in the land of Egypt, and
the Lord your God redeemed you;

57

Some Resources

Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (editors),
The Jewish Study Bible, 2nd edition (New
York: Oxford University Press, 2014)

Bible Odyssey: Latest historical and literary
research on key people, places, and
passages of the Bible. www.bibleodyssey.org

Biblical resource website of the Bishops'
Conference of England and Wales.
www.godwhospeaks.uk

Visual Commentary on Scripture:
VCS is a freely accessible online
publication that provides
theological commentary on the
Bible in dialogue with works of art.
<https://thevcs.org/>

Wisdom Commentary Series:
Exodus not available yet.
<https://litpress.org/wisdom-commentary-series>

60