

Numbers Chapter 20 v 1

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Date: 02 February 2020

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn together now to Exodus and chapter 2. And you may be thinking, why are we going to Exodus chapter 2? We're back in Numbers, surely. We are in Numbers chapter 20.

But all will become clear, I hope, as we go on through our time this evening. So we're going to read Exodus and chapter 2, the first 10 verses together.

Exodus chapter 2, the first 10 verses. Now, a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son.

When she saw that he was a fine child, or a beautiful child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him, coated it with tar and pitch, and she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.

His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe. Her attendants were walking along the riverbank.

[1 : 08] She saw the basket among the reeds and sent to her female slave to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying and she felt sorry for him. This is one of the Hebrew babies, she said.

Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you? Yes, go, she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother.

Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you. So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son.

She named him Moses, saying, I drew him out of the water. This is your life. It was on really from, well, the 50s really.

It kept having a break, and then most of the time through the late 60s, 70s, most of the 80s, it was hosted by a cordial Irishman called Eamon Andrews. And every week what would happen is that a guest would be surprised, a person from the world of sport or celebrity or entertainment or even politics and so on, and as it were, out from our cupboard almost sometimes would pop Eamon Holmes and say, Tonight!

[2 : 28] Because he was Irish, you see. That was an Irish accent, even if he didn't sound like one. Tonight, so-and-so. This is your life. And they would go, Oh, this is surprising. And then take him back to the studio, and then they'd get these guests, and people would come and talk about their life photos and all the things they did and some of their achievements and so on.

And after him, after he died in 87, it started again a little later. Michael Aspel did it for a while, and then it finished about 20 years or so ago.

Had this biographical format. And in spite of the fact that it was This Is Your Life, many of the people who appeared on it are still alive today. So 30 or 40 years later, some of them were very young when they appeared on This Is Your Life.

Well, we're going to do a This Is Your Life Miriam this evening. Because here at chapter 20, verse 1, we're told that she died and was buried.

And her death is almost like a footnote. It's almost as if she's done nothing, accomplished nothing. There's no eulogy about her life. There's no tribute about her life.

[3 : 39] There's not even anybody crying and weeping about her death, as there is later on, because at the end of the chapter, there is the death of Aaron. And there's quite a bit of detail about his death and what happened and how the people mourned, we're told there for 30 days.

But Miriam, that isn't the case. But I want, I think, to look this evening at very briefly the life of Miriam and find, I hope, some helpful instruction for us there.

I want us to look back over her life, over her successes and failures. Actually, she only appears really three occasions in the Old Testament, in Exodus, and in Numbers.

But in those three events in her life, there's something to teach us about living by faith. So let's go back again to the reading in Exodus chapter 2. That's where she first appears.

We aren't told her name, but we're almost certain this is her, because we know that later on in Exodus 6, we're told about her parents and her brothers.

[4 : 46] In Exodus 6, in verse 20, we're told Amram married his father's sisters, Jochebed, who bore him Aaron and Moses. And Amram lived 137 years.

And after that, we're told that Miriam was one of the, was a sister, a daughter as well. So we know her parents, Amram and Jochebed, we know that she had these two brothers.

Seems almost certain that she's the oldest. She's the oldest sister. Aaron followed her. And then Moses was the baby in the reeds. And at the time of her birth, her parents, along with all of her family, the Hebrew tribe, as it were, nation were living in Egypt.

They'd been there for around about 300 years or so. They'd come because one of their ancestors had been the prime minister, and the family had joined him there, been invited there to Egypt, and special honor was given to them.

But over the course of 300 years, their condition declined. So that by the time that Miriam now is here and mentioned, and that Moses is born, they're in a terrible low point.

[5 : 58] They're in slavery, in bondage to the Egyptians, badly treated, forced labor to make bricks and mortar, and ruthlessly, we're told, worked by the Egyptians.

And here is the event. A law has been passed. If you just look back to the end of Exodus 1, Pharaoh gave this order.

Pharaoh's the king. This order to all his people. Every Hebrew boy that's born must be thrown into the Nile that every girl live. This law must have been passed after Aaron was born, because obviously that would have reflected upon him.

But no, it's Moses now. Now this law comes in, and his mother and his father, very faithfully keep him safe. They see that phrase, he was a fine child.

It means they saw something about God's hand upon his life. And they protect him and keep him as long as they can, and then they make this little boat for him, this little wicker boat, put him in the reeds.

[6 : 59] And Miriam, the sister, the older sister, is left there to, ordered in one sense, to stay there and watch out for Moses. And we read the story there of what happened, how she was instrumental in seeing Moses being brought up, ultimately, in Pharaoh's household.

And quite clearly, she's obviously a young girl, spoken of as a girl, maybe only 10 years old. Maybe that's all she is, given this incredible responsibility.

And also this incredible mission, whereby she is instrumental in not only rescuing Moses and saving his life, but because of who Moses was to become, she was instrumental in God's plan of salvation for his people.

80 years later, this was part of his plan even now, at the beginning, in bringing his people out of the, slavery in Egypt, into the freedom, and ultimately into the promised land, and the blessings that God had for them.

And she's one of a number of young people that we find in the Old Testament, and in the New as well, but particularly in the Old Testament, that God uses to accomplish his purposes, and his plan for salvation.

[8 : 13] Think of others that come to mind. You remember in 2 Kings chapter 5, a young girl who's nameless, the servant of Naaman. He was the general of the Assyrian army, and through her faithful testimony, he was healed of his leprosy, but more importantly, came to faith in the true and living God.

We know, of course, of David, the young boy, in his early teens, almost certainly a shepherd boy, defeating the Philistine giant Goliath in combat, saves King Saul and the army.

Then there's the boy Samuel, isn't there, in the temple, called by God, even as a child, to preach to Eli, and to rebuke him, about the behavior of his sons, and we could go on and on.

Even Mary, when we think of Mary, when the angel comes to her, almost certainly a teenage girl, that the Lord uses. So what do we learn then?

What do we learn to begin with, from Miriam's life here, as it were, in her early years? Well, surely we do learn this, simply, that God can and does use children, in his service.

[9 : 20] God can and does use children. Sometimes we think, that a child has to be of a certain age, run for that way, before God can use them, or work through them. Sometimes when you're a young boy or girl, you think that as well.

Well, perhaps when I'm older, God can work in my life, and use me. Perhaps when I'm older, I can trust him, and I can be a witness for him, at school, or ballet classes, or wherever it may be.

But the truth is, that God has and does, use children, in his purposes, and has done again, and again. It's a lovely little story, maybe you know it, concerning that very famous preacher, from the 19th century, Spurgeon, Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

It's something that happened to him, when he was six. And he'd gone to visit his grandfather, his grandfather was a pastor, a pastor of a congregational church, and when he went to visit his grandfather, his grandfather was talking, no doubt, with his own son, and with members of the family.

He was lamenting. He was sad, because there was somebody in his care, in the congregation, who was inconsistent, in their Christian life. They weren't always there, on a Sunday, and they weren't always faithful, in the way they lived.

[10 : 28] And this grieved the pastor, very much. And it had an effect, upon this young boy, of six. One day, Charles suddenly declared, his intention to kill, Old Rhodes.

That was the name of the man. His name was Mr. Rhodes. Old Rhodes, they called him, because he was an older man. And in spite of his warning, his grandfather gave him, and told him, the awful state of murderism, that he should never do it.

He said, I'll not do anything bad. He said, but I'm going to kill him. Well, shortly afterwards, he asserted, that he'd done this. That he'd done the deed, on Old Rhodes, who would never trouble, his grandfather anymore.

But he'd not done anything bad. Well, they just couldn't work out, what he had done. Anyway, Mr. Rhodes, appeared at the manse, came to see the pastor, and he explained, what had happened. He said that he'd been, sitting in the pub, reading his paper, with a mug of beer. When the boy, came into the pub, and pointed to him, and said, what doest thou here, Elijah?

[11 : 30] In other words, what are you doing here, Elijah? Sitting with the ungodly, and you a member of the church, and breaking your pastor's hearts.

I'm ashamed of you. I wouldn't break my pastor's heart, I'm sure. And the man was deeply convicted, by this little six-year-old boy, pointing out to him his sin.

And we're told that, during the rest of his life, he only lived another four years, but he was completely restored to the Lord, and lived an exemplary life of faith. We need to entrust, our children, with opportunities, to exercise their faith.

We need to trust our children, to do things for God. We mustn't feel, that we've got to keep them away, or prevent them, from speaking out for the Lord Jesus, or in some other way, hiding their light under the bushel.

God uses children. And I wonder, was the obedience of Miriam, and she was obedient, it's clear, isn't it really, that it was her mother and her father, who told her to wait there, to lurch out for the boy, and almost certainly told her what to say.

[12 : 44] Was her obedience, due to the fact that she, felt entrusted by her parents? Was her willingness, to do what they asked, because she knew that they believed in her.

They had confidence in her. Dear friends, we need to do that, with our young people, in our own fellowship. We need to pray, for the young people, in our fellowship. At this moment in time, we're greatly blessed, with several families.

Greatly blessed, with young people, who are worshipping with us. They are part of the life, of the church. We don't know, where they are with the Lord. We trust and pray, that they will come to genuine faith in him, and some have, even at a very early age.

Let's continue to pray for them. Let's encourage them in their faith. Let's not hamper them in their faith. Let's not belittle them in their faith. Let's build them up, in that faith. And Miriam, I think, is an example in that.

Now I want you to turn with me, please, to the next event, in Miriam's life. Turn to Exodus, in chapter 15, in your Bibles. Exodus 15. We've looked at, Miriam's early, faith.

[13 : 49] And, I want us to look at, Miriam's finest hour. Miriam's finest hour. It's here. And I'm going to read from, Exodus 15. We'll pick up from, verse 19.

Verse 19 of Exodus 15. It's page 73. When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen, went into the sea, the Lord brought the waters, of the sea, back over them.

But the Israelites, walked through the sea, on dry ground. Then Miriam, the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine, in her hand. And all the women, followed her, with tambourines, and dancing. Miriam sang to them, sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted, both horse and driver, he has hurled, into the sea. I'm sure you're aware, of the setting.

People of God, have come out, from Egypt, on that terrible night, the Passover night. And not very soon after, Pharaoh decides, that he isn't going, to let them go afterwards, and sends his army, and his chariots, to track them down, and to bring them back.

[14 : 52] However, they have reached, what we call, the Red Sea, and they are stuck. The chariots, of Pharaoh, are coming in, behind them. The Red Sea, before them, they have nowhere to go.

And God, wonderfully, and mercifully, delivers them. And the sea is parted, an incredible miracle, and all of God's people, pass through safely, and as Pharaoh's army, seeks to follow after them, God brings the waves, crashing down upon them, to their own destruction.

And, beginning of chapter 5, tells us, verse 1, Moses and the Israelites, sang a song of praise, to the Lord, and they sing, this amazing song, I sing to the Lord, he's highly exalted, both horse and driver, he's hurled into the sea.

And, here we're told, in verse 21, Miriam, takes up a tambourine, and, and she, leads the women, in this same song, almost a chorus, isn't it?

Sing to the Lord, for he's highly exalted, sing to the Lord, so they take up the first line, as a chorus. I think, there's this sort of, singing going on, this praising of God, going on, and it's Miriam, who leads them, who leads the women, in this praise, in this worship of God, encouraging them, to give him thanks, and to honour his name.

[16 : 09] It's Miriam's finest hour, it's her 15 minutes, if we can put it, of fame, and here she is, she's called also, notice a prophet, in verse 20. Now, sometimes we only think, of prophets, in the Old Testament, and you, as being those, who foretell the future.

Now, that was some, of their ministry, but their main ministry, of a prophet, was to proclaim God's word. I think of Elijah, and Elisha, and others, they didn't often, give prophecies, for the future, but spoke God's word, directly into the situation.

So here is Miriam, we're told only here, that she's a prophet, she's speaking, God's word to the people, and she's, a cause of blessing, to the company, and a cause, of great glory, to God.

So, we ask again, the question, what does Miriam's actions, here, have to teach us? Now, this, there is no hint, and I say this, and you're going to think, I'm not believing it, there's no hint, of patronizing, in my voice, in what I'm saying here, God, can and does, use women, in his service, for his glory.

Okay, I'm not patronizing you, dear ladies, I'm telling you, that this is the case. Once again, we see Miriam, she's one of many other women, that God, uses, and blesses, and works through, for his glory, for instruments, for salvation, for his people.

[17 : 34] And she's just one of them here, and here she is, she's a source of great blessing, as she proclaims God's word, as she leads these women, encourages these women, in their faith, and in their praise of God.

And so, we can think of others, think of Deborah, in Judges, in chapter four. She also was spoken of, as a prophet, who was married to a prophet. She was the one, who gave the message, to Barak, and said, go and attack the Canaanites, for the Lord is with you, and give you triumph there.

And we know, sadly, Barak, was afraid, and he asked Deborah, to go with him, and support him, and so she went, and together, they fought against, the Canaanites.

And she sings, a great song of praise, to God, for his deliverance. And in that same story, there's that very interesting lady, called Jael. J-A-E-L. I think that's how you pronounce her name.

And she was used by the Lord, to put to death, Sisera, the Canaanite general. Without being too gruesome, she drove a tent peg, through his head. Okay, while he was asleep.

[18 : 34] But there, again, it was a woman, that the Lord used, to defeat this great general. Deborah, the Lord used, to serve the Lord, and bring deliverance, for his people.

And there's others as well, aren't there? The book of Esther, is all about God, using this queen, Esther, to deliver the people of God, from certain destruction. Think of Rahab, mentioned in Hebrews, as one of the heroes of the faith, who protected, and gave shelter, to the spies, in Jericho. And so we could go on, and again, we can think of history, where God has raised up, and used women, in particularly special ways, to deliver, and to care for. Many of you will know, the story of Gladys Aylwood, the very little London, girl, who went out to China, in spite of everybody saying, she wasn't fit for it.

And there, in the 1930s, how she, single-handedly, really saved, over a hundred children, leading them, through that war-torn, and ravaged nation, when the Japanese, attacked.

And, we can think of others too, that the Lord has, greatly blessed, and used. But there's one thing, we need to notice here, and it comes out, particularly in Miriam, and again, this is something, that I say, without any patronizing, whatsoever.

[19 : 54] Miriam's, particular ministry, was to women. Her ministry, was particularly, to other women. She led the women, in song. She didn't lead, all of Israel. Moses led, all of Israel, in worship, but she led, the women in worship, and in praising God.

And the New Testament, teaches us, that God's normal way, of using, believing women, in the church, is to make them, a blessing to other women. Just take up, from Titus in chapter 2.

Titus chapter 2, Paul writes this, to Titus, likewise, teach the older women, to be reverent, in the way they live, not to be slanderous, nor addicted, to much wine, but to teach, what is good.

Who are they to teach? They are to train, the younger women, to love their husbands, and children, to be self-controlled, and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, to be subject, to their husbands, so that no one, will malign, the word of God.

It's a great ministry, that you ladies, have to one another. Now, the subject of, women's ministry, in the church, has created, such a lot of heat, and not a lot of light, at times, and I don't want to add, to that in any way, but it's very clear, in scripture, that there are, some aspects of service, which God, has so purposed, for each gender.

[21 : 16] Women have a particular, ministry to women, but, there are other ministries, which are not for women, and again, as Paul, in 1 Timothy chapter 2, this time, I do not permit, a woman to teach, or to have authority, over a man, she must be silent, for Adam, was formed first, then Eve.

Paul's argument, is not, women are inferior, women are stupid, women can't do it, his argument, is a creation order, God has put things, in a particular way, that they are to be done, in the life of his church, how the church, is to be led, how the church, is to be ministered to, and so on, and in his order, by creation, he created Adam first, and Eve second, now, we must encourage, women, to use the gifts, that God has given them, and just as we encourage, men, to use their gifts too, and a great deal, of harm, has been done, to women, when God's word, has been wrongly applied, as it has been, for a very long time, and in very many ways, this passage, does not say, women are second class, or third class, there are no second, or third class people, in the church, there's no degrees, there's no separation, we are one, as Paul says, in Galatians 3, there is neither Jew, nor Greek, slave, nor free, male, nor female, we are all one, in Christ Jesus, but there are, ways, that God has put, plans and purposes,

God has put, in his church, because he knows best, not because men know best, they don't, not because women know best, they don't, because God knows best, because he, he is perfect, so, Miriam, she, this is her great high point, she's used, and blessed, speaks God's word, and encourages, the women, and I'm sure beyond that, the church too, but, there's one more event, in the life of Miriam, that we need to turn to, and that's found, in Numbers, in chapter 12, please would you turn there, for a moment, Numbers, in chapter 12, if you've got one of, the church bibles, that's page 148, page 148, after the, early years, of Miriam, and the wonderful, way in which the Lord, used her there, and, in her latter years, when she's, obviously, probably about 90, or so, because we know, that Moses was 80, and she was the older sister, the Lord, uses her to lead the people, and the women, in worship, and praise, we then come to, a very sad event, in her life, it's the last recorded event, in the life of Miriam, and it's Miriam's, sad fall, not going to read, all of it there, but it's there, in chapter 12, we looked at this, just a few weeks ago, before Christmas, in some detail, how she, we're told in verse 1,

Miriam and Aaron, began to talk, against Moses, because of his, Cushite wife, for he had married, a Cushite, has the Lord, spoken only through Moses, they asked, hasn't he also, spoken through us, remember Miriam's in this, the Lord heard this, this is some months, after they've left, Egypt, from

her great example, and, we looked at this, a few months ago, and I don't want to, go over it too much, but her, but we need to just, have a brief reminder, it's clear that her motivation, is not concern, for God's word, it's not concern, that God's word, is not being taught, but, it's not because, she has a love for Moses, that she feels, he's doing too much, and she wants to take, some of the load off him, in the ministry, in fact the trigger, we see to her, complaining about him, was something very different, she complains about his wife, Cushite was a person, from Ethiopia, somebody who was black, may not be a racist thing, altogether, but it may just be, that she took exception, to the fact, that he'd married, this other woman, remember his first wife, Zipporah, we don't know, what's happened to her, she may have died, she may have gone back home, with her father, Raul, we don't know, anything about it, we just know, that he married this woman, and she took exception, against it, and used, his marriage, as a way, to criticize him, but it wasn't the real issue, it was a red herring, as it were, to sort of give, I can put it one way, a veil, to her jealousy, and her desire, to lord it, over God's people, she somehow says, that this marriage, that he's entered into, makes him unfit, to be God's messenger, God's servant, and God's leader, and as you go through, you find that, God calls, Aaron, and Miriam, and Moses, to stand before him, at the tabernacle, and Miriam, is given, leprosy, struck by God, with a terrible skin complaint, there in verse 10, the cloud lifted, from above the tent, Miriam's skin was leprous, became as white, as snow,

[26 : 18] I think that, shows that she's something, of the ringleader, between her, and her younger brother, Aaron, God, strikes her down, wonderfully, mercifully, as Aaron prays for her, he heals her, but, we're told there, that she was unclean, for 30 days, verse 15 tells us, or seven days rather, she sort of puts a halt, on the progress, of the church, of the camp is stopped, from going forward, because of her sin, and the people, are prevented, from moving towards, a promised land, so again, what do we learn, from Miriam's actions here, well dear friends, there's a danger, isn't there, a danger of, starting well, but not finishing well, for us as believers, and how, necessary it is, for us not to give, sin room, in our hearts, could it be, that Miriam's, high point, her 15 minutes, of fame, her worshipping of God, and leading the people, had gone to her head, maybe she felt, good about that, and felt well, you know,

God has used me, in this way, therefore I, you know, I should be a leader, with Moses, I should be there, teaching the people too, it's often the case, that when we have known, the greatest blessing, from God, whether that be individually, or as a local church, that's when we're, in greatest danger, it's then we become, a little bit, comfortable, it's then we become, a little bit, haughty, it's then we can allow, as we thought even this morning, pride, to get in, and that is something, that we cannot give room to, remember the apostle Paul, he tells us, in 2 Corinthians 12, that he was given, this great blessing, from God, this incredible blessing, where he saw, into the third heaven, he saw heaven, and this great revelation, of God, and afterwards he said, therefore in order, to keep me from becoming, conceited, I was given a thorn, in the flesh, to keep him, from being conceited, keep him from being proud, keep him from becoming, arrogant, in his heart, dear friends, we need to pray, for one another, we do sin, we do fall, but we do long, to finish the race, don't we well, Miriam sadly, from all that we know, after that event, we know nothing more really, of her, until her death, there is no sign, of repentance, there is no sign, of turning back, to the Lord, or of seeking, reconciliation, and that's why, I think we have sadly, just this footnote, Miriam died, and was buried, dear friends, we don't want to build, a name for ourselves, we don't want to build, a name for this church, so that people, will look at us, and say how good we are, or clever we are, whatever, but we want to, keep running the race, faithfully, and though we fall, we need to get right, with God, we need to repent, of our sin, we need to put things, in order, so pray for each other, Miriam, this was your life, so many good things, but at the end, sadly a fall, we need to keep, encouraging each other, supporting each other, praying for one another, that we may finish, the race, as Paul did, that we might finish it well, that we might finish it well.