

PART ONE
Biblical Dance

A Dance of Rejoicing

Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing, as Miriam sang to them: Sing to ADONAI, for He is highly exalted! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!

—Exodus 15:20–21

The first mention of dance in the Bible is Miriam's dance of rejoicing. The full story surrounding Miriam's dance is found in Exodus 14–15.

Miriam grew up in a Hebrew slave family in Egypt and played a large role in the life of her brother Moses. The children of Israel greatly increased in number during their time of slavery to the Egyptians. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, sought to control their growth by increased labor and cruelty toward them. However, they continued to multiply. Pharaoh feared that if war broke out, the Hebrews could join his enemies, fight against him, and escape from the land. His solution was to command the midwives to kill all Hebrew baby boys at birth, thereby reducing their population and strength. Miriam's brother Moses was born. Scripture

describes the baby as “desirable,” “goodly,” and “extraordinarily beautiful” (Exodus 2:2 and Acts 7:20), so her mother, Jochebed, hid him for three months. When hiding him was no longer feasible, Jochebed placed him in a basket and set him in the Nile River.

Miriam watched and followed the floating basket with her baby brother crying inside until it came to where Pharaoh’s daughter was bathing at the riverside. Moved by compassion for the baby, the princess decided to keep him as her own. Here is where Miriam intervened and offered to find him a nurse maid, who of course turned out to be his own mother. Miriam had the intelligence and confidence to follow Moses down the river and then boldly speak to Pharaoh’s daughter; an indication that she was not a small child.

Time carried on. After weaning, Moses was raised in Pharaoh’s house, always aware that he had a Hebrew heritage. One day, Moses observed an Egyptian severely mistreat his people. Assuming no one would see him, Moses killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. However, his kinsmen had observed the actions and did not appreciate his attempted intervention. Fearing that Pharaoh would discover his act, he fled to the land of Midian where he settled and married; had two children; and spent the next forty years shepherding flocks for his father-in-law Jethro.

The Lord heard the groanings from Moses’ people, still enslaved in Egypt while Moses was away, and the time became ripe to send him back to help release them from bondage. God spoke to Moses through a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire, telling him to return to Pharaoh for their release. Now wouldn’t that get your attention? Reluctantly, but with God’s promise to send Moses’ brother, Aaron, to assist him, and the promise He would deliver His people through Moses’ actions of obedience to

the Lord, Moses returned to Egypt to confront Pharaoh for their release.

Instead of circumstances getting better for the Hebrews once Moses returned, they got worse. Much worse. With each demand from Moses for their freedom, Pharaoh increased their workload and abuses, and many of them resented Moses for coming to free them.

Obedient to the voice of the Lord rather than man, Moses pressed on for their release to go and worship God. During this time, God sent the promised plagues in response to Pharaoh's stubborn heart and refusals. Only following the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn of all living things (including Pharaoh's son), was Pharaoh finally willing to release the Hebrews. Now, he wanted them gone, and gone immediately.

Having already prepared for this according to God's directives, the masses of Hebrew people, along with others who chose to join them, made their way out of Egypt. So fearful of what had happened, and eager to see the Hebrews quickly leave, the Egyptians gladly and generously gave whatever the Hebrews asked for. They plundered the Egyptians of their silver, gold, and clothing.

After a bit of time, however, Pharaoh recanted on their release and sent his armies to chase after them, catching up to them at the Sea of Reeds. Trapped at the water's edge, the Hebrews once again feared for their lives. Directed by his ever-faithful God, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the Lord parted the waters so they could cross. As the Egyptians also tried to cross, however, the water came back over them and destroyed the entire army.

Seeing the Lord had saved them, Moses and Miriam broke out singing and praising God for His demonstration of absolute

greatness and power in freeing them and their people. Astounded over this miracle, they sang a new song with music birthed from their rejoicing hearts. Following Miriam's lead, "all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing."

Moses' and Miriam's song, as well as Miriam's dance with the women, were spontaneous acts of praise and worship in response to God's love and saving grace that He had just poured out for them. The words of their song declared what had just transpired by God's mighty hand. Miriam's dance was a deep emotional response, an ecstatic reaction—rejoicing with wisdom, understanding, and exultation—to what the Lord had just miraculously done. There was no preparation, just praise springing forth from their mouths and their very beings. This is a wonderful way to worship God.

Rejoice in the Lord always—again I will say, rejoice!
—*Philippians 4:4*

While Miriam's dance is the first mention of dance in the Bible, was it the birthing of dance on the earth? Picture the Garden of Eden, the most beautiful place that has ever existed, lush and fertile and full of the broad spectrum of the plant and animal kingdoms and their musical speech just before God's final creation.

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