

Breaking Down Barriers, Building Up Faith

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT PAGE

When I was a kid—in the days before cable TV, DVDs, and Netflix—I grew up watching the *Ten Commandments* movie during its annual broadcast on ABC around the Passover and Easter holidays. I was fascinated by the characters of Moses, Nefertiry, Joshua, and others who leapt off the screen and into my heart. But when I read the account of Moses in Exodus, I felt little of that same excitement.

Until I learned to *study* God's Word.

When we study, digging deeper into the culture, original Hebrew, surrounding nations, and the characters themselves, the same big-screen fascination is stirred within us by the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, few have the time or training to delve into Scripture or historical research so deeply. The best thing to do is ask for help, and that's exactly what I did.

After I finished writing *Miriam*, I needed to move to my next writing project, but there was so much more I wanted readers to glean from Scripture. So I enlisted the help of a young family friend, Lyndsey Kirk. I've known Lyndsey since the day she was born, so it's especially thrilling for me to see her grow into a woman of God and swim in the depths of her biblical insights. Here's a message from Lyndsey about her current life and ministry:



Hi! I'm Lyndsey, and I've served students on the Lawrence University campus since 2012 through His House Christian Fellowship. The campus café is my "office" where I meet with students for Bible study, prayer, evangelistic conversations, and one-on-one discipleship. I love the campus, the conservatory of music, and the intelligent conversations and intellectual debates that make up the "Lawrence Difference." My prayer as campus minister is to show students God's love, the hope of the Gospel, and the peace that is found only in Jesus Christ.

Lyndsey wades into deep spiritual waters but is able to teach both beginners and advanced swimmers new truths. I can't wait for you to see all that God has shown her...and all that He'll reveal to us through her words. Join Lyndsey and me in the pages that follow as we go deeper into the life and lessons of *Miriam*.



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WEEK ONE

The Barrier of a God We Can't See

~ How can I believe in (and trust) a God I cannot see? ~

(For those who put their faith in the tangible, the seen, the things they can observe with their senses)

Meet Taliah, a fictional character in the novel. Raised in King Ramesses' harem to become a tutor to his sons, Taliah is an intellectual woman who is thrust into the Hebrew camp. She's grown up denying the false gods of Egypt. Why is Miriam's God any different?

- "I've never had such feelings or sensations [from Yahweh]. I suppose I'm not special enough to be chosen."
- "Why don't gods speak to everyone? The Egyptian gods only speak with the priests or through Pharaoh himself, who claims to be divine, and El Shaddai only speaks through Miriam. Why is that?"

Other characters had similar difficulty believing in an invisible God:

- "But how do you know He's near, Ima, if you don't have dreams or visions to interpret?" "How can we common people know any god exists when we don't feel or see signs of their presence?" "How could [Miriam] praise a God she couldn't see or understand?"
- "El Shaddai had always been Doda's god, Saba and Savta's god, but never Eleazar's god. He was too holy to fathom and too distant to trust... 'If you're there, Yahweh, prove it to me.'" "Who is this Yahweh? What has He ever done for us?" "Yahweh, if You hear me, know that I will serve You, but I still fear Your vast silence, Your great unknown.' Was it enough to serve and obey though uncertainties still lingered?"



Each of the quotations on the previous page explores a slightly different nuance to the very common barrier: *How can I possibly believe in (or come to know, understand, and relate to) a God I cannot see?*

Describe a time when God's invisibility was a stumbling block to faith for you.

Read Luke 16:25-31 and Romans 1:19-20. What do these passages tell us about the ways in which God has revealed Himself, or made Himself "seen" to us?

What do you think about Miriam's words from chapter 35: "Forgive me for being so *blind* to Your presence?" How can we be "blind" to God's presence?

We see this concept again in the last chapter when the Egyptian army is pursuing the frightened Israelites into the Red Sea. Miriam encourages her fellow Israelites to "Look at the walls. Focus on God's glory," and those who focus on Yahweh's deliverance are fortified with courage. Why do you think we don't *see* God sometimes? What things do you tend to focus on that might be distracting you from God's power and presence that is at work right beside you?



Also in the last chapter, faith is defined as a “battle, its battlefield the mind.” **Read Hebrews 11:1.** How would you define or describe *faith* to someone? Is there room for doubt or uncertainty in the “battle” of faith according to your definition of faith?

In your opinion, what is the difference between *conviction* and *certainty*? In your journey of faith, have you ever felt uncertain about God? What made you feel uncertain? What was it that gave you renewed faith, belief, and hope in Him?

In what ways have you been able to “see” God in the world? In nature? In people? In art? In His Word? In acts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?



This Week's Faith Builders

Look for God-sightings in your life this week. See the last bullet point above for practical suggestions (I bet you can find at least one instance of God showing up every day, if you look for it! ☺). Write them down.

Also, make it a goal to tell at least one person about your “God sightings” this week. Even if they don’t understand why you view your incident as “God’s visibility,” just live with the wonder. Miriam says, “Let them wonder – its how faith grows.”



Scriptures to Build On

~ Use the space below each Scripture to note new insights prompted by today's study. ~

Luke 16:25-31 – “But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish’ ... And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father to send him to my father’s house – for I have five brothers – so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Romans 1:19-20 – “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”

Hebrews 11:1 – “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things *not seen*.”



WEEK TWO

The Barrier of Doubting God's Goodness

~ **How can I trust God to do good things for me when I see so much evil around the world?** ~

(For those who put their faith in safety, security, and the “good life” they create for themselves.)

Meet Eleazar—Aaron's third-born son and nephew of Miriam and Moses. In Exodus 28:1, we learn that Eleazar becomes a priest, but in Miriam's story, Eleazar is a devout bachelor whose life as a slave soldier has hardened his heart toward any god. Though he adores his doda Miriam and his grandparents, Amram and Jochebed, he has nothing but disdain for their god who has seemingly abandoned Israel and acted as capriciously as the Egypt's deities.

- “If this is what it means to be chosen by your god, I'd rather serve Anubis and take my chances in Egypt's afterlife.”
- “How dare he hope in the God he'd cursed at Kadesh...It would take more than a few tricks to bring Eleazar to his knees?”
- “Whether or not Yahweh was real didn't excuse the inhumanity Eleazar witnessed every day. How could any god watch men's cruelty and do nothing? And if Yahweh was real, how could He let Israel suffer the harsh bondage of Egypt all these years? No matter how many miracles Yahweh performed, these questions deserved answers before Eleazar could trust Him.”

Other characters also struggled to reconcile God's goodness with the evil they saw in the world:

- “Why does Yahweh attack His own family? Why must God's people suffer along with those He's punishing? I don't understand it.”
- “How can we know when Yahweh will protect us and when He'll welcome tragedy into our house?”
- “I'm trying to trust You, but must You take everyone I love?”
“She had always known Shaddai's love. Now, she was seeing Yahweh's power and it terrified her.”
- “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?”
- Didn't we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’?”



Each of the quotations on the previous page explores a slightly different nuance to the very common barrier of faith: *How can I know for sure that He is good—especially when faced with the problem of pain/evil in the world?*

Sometimes we *see* God's hand at work, but we're not quite sure we like what we see. Describe a time when you found it hard to trust God's goodness and His plans.

Have you ever demanded that God do something about the cruelty in the world? What was it you wanted Him to do?

Now—if we turn the lens back on ourselves—what do we want God to do when He finds us being cruel? Do we want Him to punish, or do we want Him to forgive?

In chapter 36, Miriam asks Eleazar if he is really going to stand in judgment of God. He answers, "Yes! ...I judge a god who kills the righteous with the unrighteous." **Read Romans 3:10-12, Psalm 14:1-3, and Genesis 6:5-6.** According to these verses, when we place ourselves on the "righteousness scale," how do we weigh? With this in mind, what might you say to Eleazar concerning his demands and judgment of God (or your own demands and judgment of God)?



As you observe cruelty in the world, are you quick to include yourself among the cruel and the wicked, or among the righteous? **Read Jeremiah 10:24.** Examine your life to see where you exemplify cruelty, wickedness, and oppression of others. Ask God to correct you from your cruelty and wickedness. Consider also asking God to correct the cruelty of the wicked oppressors in the world, and to correct them not in His anger, lest they be destroyed. Ask God to redeem the cruelty in this world, and bring peace.

Aside from our own culpability in the evil we see in the world, sometimes it is just plain hard to see anything good around us or to have any hope of goodness, redemption, or peace conquering the evils we face. This makes it hard to trust God...to trust that He is good, or that He even exists! **Read Matthew 7:9-11** and **Luke 12:29-30, 32.** How do these passages help you remember God's goodness?

Read Isaiah 55:8-9. How does this passage help you trust God? Or how might it be frustrating?

Read Romans 5:6-8. How does Christ's death *prove* that God is for us, and that His actions are loving and for our good? What would happen if we chose to measure God's compassion, love, and goodness by the cross? How might it change our perspective on Him?



This Week's Faith Builders

Keep Romans 3:10-12 in mind. Consider asking God to keep you in a humble remembrance of your own unrighteousness, and your need for HIM to make you righteous.

Write out Isaiah 55:8-9 and **Luke 12:32** on a post it note or a note card you can keep with you. Throughout each day, when you find yourself feeling weary or troubled, reread these verses or repeat them to yourself as a reminder that God is good, and His plans and ways are higher (and better) than yours. Take comfort in His “bigness” and goodness.

Bonus assignment

Each day, pray this part of the “Gospel Prayer” (written by J.D. Greear in his book *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary*). Let it remind you of the truth we found in **Romans 5:6-8**:

~~~*“As I pray, I’ll measure Your compassion by the cross and Your power by the resurrection.”* ~~~



## Scriptures to Build On

~Use the space below each Scripture to note new insights prompted by today's study.~

**Romans 3:10-12** – “As it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’”

**Psalms 14:1-3** – “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.”

**Genesis 6:5-6** – “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”

**Jeremiah 10:24** – “Correct me, O Lord, but in justice; not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing.”



**Matthew 7:9-11** – “Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

**Luke 12:29-30, 32** – “And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them...Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

**Isaiah 55:8-9** – “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

**Romans 5:8** – “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”



# WEEK THREE

## The Barrier of Feeling Abandoned By God

~ Why can't I feel God's presence or relate to Him like I used to? ~

**(For those who put their faith in a special or unique manifestation of God's presence)**

*Meet Miriam—an eighty-six year-old, unmarried prophetess, who has been the sole mouthpiece of God to the people of Israel since she was a child. In Numbers 12, Yahweh told Miriam He spoke to prophets in dreams and vision, so that's how I described God's communication with Miriam for most of her life...until Moses returns from Midian. Then, I imagined, Miriam's relationship with God changed as she watched her brothers take the leadership role and this "Yahweh" feel more distant than the El Shaddai she'd known.*

- "El Shaddai's presence is more real to me than the Nile. He is the air I breathe. He is the beating of my heart. I converse with Him all day long, and He replies – in His own way. But this morning was different. He is silent."
- "How could she explain her abject emptiness when no one else had experienced her absolute fullness? Shaddai had been everything to her – Husband, Friend, Teacher, Guide, and Master. 'I feel as if I'm withering from the inside out...I don't feel hunger or thirst or a yearning to sleep. I feel only a yawning void that was once Miriam but now is an empty shell...because Shaddai has abandoned me.'"
- "El Shaddai spoke in many ways to many people. Could she learn to hear Him differently? To experience His presence again but through new expressions?"
- "Stubborn? I've been extremely flexible considering all the changes I've endured... Especially with a God who has changed beyond my recognition."
- "...but it's not just my knowledge that's changed. My relationship has changed because I don't know how to feel about this new knowledge or how to incorporate the new knowledge into my daily living."

*Miriam wrestled with much internal dialogue and external exchanges before she came to this pivotal moment:*

- "A warm breeze lifted her sheer linen head covering. She didn't consider whether it was Yahweh's breath or simply the wind. She knew now that Yahweh could speak in any way He liked. She need only lean into the people He placed into her life to hear Him clearly."





Each of the quotations on the previous page explores a slightly different nuance to the very common barrier of faith: *Why has God abandoned me? I can't feel His presence like I used to. I don't know how to relate to Him anymore.*

Maybe you've seen God, you know He is good, you have trusted Him and know the joys of drawing near to His presence. But has there been a time when you *felt* abandoned by God? **Write about** time when you couldn't sense Him actively involved in your life. Was there a particular incident that caused you to feel like He'd abandoned you? A new phase of life? Extreme pain or despair? Seeing Him work in another's life in ways you had never experienced?

**Read** Amram's thoughts on Miriam's situation, from chapter 9:

"El Shaddai has not abandoned you any more than He's abandoned Israel. For reasons that only He knows, He has chosen to become silent, and you must trust His silence – as Israel has trusted His silence all these years. Your ima and I have never experienced Him the way you have, but we know Him and love Him... You can learn to know Him anew, but you must trust Him in the silence, daughter."

Miriam had never imagined that she could know Him any way other than how she'd always known Him. What do you think of this idea that sometimes God might seem silent because He is trying to reveal Himself to us in a new way that we've never known before?

**How** might some of the lessons from week one, about looking for God and *seeing* God, help us in a time when it feels like God has abandoned us? Again, what kinds of things can make us "blind" to God's presence?



**How** might the lessons from week two, about God's faithfulness and goodness, help us in a time when it feels like God is absent, distant, or indifferent?

**Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.** Why do you think God commanded Israel to tell the story of God to one another, as they sat, as they walked as they worked, etc.?

**Read** this quotation about Miriam's experience in chapter 19: "Somehow the confidence of her declarations [about Yahweh] made Yahweh's silence to her more bearable."

When God seems silent or absent or inactive, what benefit might there be in continuing to tell others the truths and stories we know about Him and His character?

**Describe** a time when God felt absent to you, but you were reminded of His faithfulness by hearing someone tell their story, or telling someone else your own story of God's work in your life.



**Read** this portion of Miriam’s conversation with her faithful parents in chapter 9: “**“But how do you know He’s near, Ima, if you don’t have dreams or visions to interpret?”**... ‘Anyone can develop a God-sense similar to the way we use other senses to experience things. Though we can’t taste, touch, see, hear, or smell our invisible God, He sometimes uses those experiences to communicate His nearness...And sometimes it’s simply a feeling...You simply know He is. There’s no magic or sign. He just is.’”

Now **Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11**. Perhaps we, in the Body of Christ, should have similar conversations about the various “manifestations of the Spirit.” Is one kind of “hearing” from God better than another? Is one kind of revelation of God or manifestation of His Spirit more real or spiritual than another? Why do some people “hear” from God differently than others in the Body of Christ?

**Describe** a time when you weren’t able to see God or sense His presence in your own life, and another believer helped you to see Him more clearly through their gifts, their “manifestation of the Spirit.”

Do you believe that sometimes, even as believers, we might need to develop a new “God-sense” or perhaps have our God-sense stretched or refined? Why might God choose to reveal Himself or manifest Himself to us in a new way, a way we haven’t known or seen or felt Him before?



## This Week's Faith Builders

Let's implement some of the Deuteronomy 6 commands into our lives this week. If you have children (or friends, colleagues, family members...anyone!), ask God for opportunities to tell God's story, His faithfulness, His holiness, His commands to them this week.

Or, start a practice this week in your home, your apartment, your dorm room, etc. of reciting God's goodness or reading scripture as you sit at home in the evening.

Or brainstorm creative ways to tell His story as you "walk by the way"...maybe to the grocery store clerk, or the drive-thru attendant!

Adopt a habit of praying (either alone or with a buddy) "when you lie down and when you rise."

How might you bind His words on your hand, between your eyes, or on the doorpost of your house? Get creative! Have fun with it! Adopt some new practices of having God's story always before you and always on your lips, and see what happens!

### \*\*\*Bonus Assignment\*\*\*

This week, seek out a fellow believer, from your church or Christian community, whose gifts or interactions with God are different from your own (maybe even someone who you don't understand very well). Spend some time with this person, asking questions about his/her "God-sense." How has this person known God? Listen carefully, and see what you might learn about God that is new to you. Consider asking God to show up to you in a new way.



## Scriptures to Build On

Use the space below each Scripture to note new insights prompted by today's study.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9** – “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our god, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

**1 Corinthians 12:4-11** – “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”



# WEEK FOUR

## The Barrier of One God Among Many

**~ What distinguishes your God from other gods and  
His supernatural activity from other supernatural activity? ~**

**(For those who put their faith in any supernatural activity, any god, or anything that  
defies nature or goes beyond human intellect**

*Meet Pharaoh—declared as son of the god Horus, the king of Egypt not only ruled the land, he was imagined to be divinely conceived and lived out his days as the representative of the Egyptian deities on earth. His noble advisors were priests and magicians—in Egypt, one in the same. So when a slave’s God demonstrated His power over Pharaoh...well, it was startling.*

- “If the Hebrew god can strike the Nile, he's stronger than the Nile god, Hapi, and Kopshef can't command him.”
- “‘Tell your god the Son of Horus declares that he should kill the frogs tomorrow.’ ‘It will be as you say, Ramesses...Tomorrow the frogs will die so that you will know that there is no god like Yahweh among your gods.’”
- “Pharaoh’s fury turned to rage...‘Are you telling me that none of Egypt’s gods can overpower this Yahweh?’ ‘Jannes and Jambres have tried every spell and chant. I too have called on every god and dark spirit, but our magic can’t duplicate this plague [biting gnats]...This plague is the finger of the Hebrew God.’”
- “It's not Moses and Aaron that overpower Egypt’s gods. It's their Yahweh. Who’s going to kill him when we can't even match his tricks?”
- “‘All right! You may sacrifice in the wilderness, but don’t go far. Now pray for me!’ The Egyptian guards exchanged a stunned glance as did Hoshea and Eleazar. Pharaoh, deified Son of Horus, asked for a blessing from a slave's God.”



*Other characters also tried to make sense of multiple gods or “guiding forces” and the differences between them.*

- “Everything in Creation need[s] a guiding force. Egypt had the Nile. Sailors had the stars. Miriam and her brothers had Yahweh. Eleazar must determine his. As long as he viewed Yahweh as the enemy or another capricious deity among Egypt’s many gods, his course would never be steady.”
- “The strange and frightening things that make you question Yahweh are the very things that help me believe...I don't want a warm-bread god that I can understand...I need a God I can't explain to do the things I know are impossible.”
- “No doubt, they hoped to win Yahweh's favor with gifts as they believed other gods could be swayed.”
- “Many gods have been created by men, but only one God created all men.”

It wasn’t just the Egyptians who had turned to other gods. Israel had fallen into a spiritual malaise during their four hundred years of captivity. Only after months of witnessing God’s unrelenting power to bring about their deliverance did the Israelites truly recognize the “I AM”:

- “The light and heat drove many Hebrews to their knees, their weeping turned to wonder, their wonder to praise. The enormity of God’s majesty roared in [the pillar of fire], and His firstborn Israel responded with a roar of worship, shaking the ground. As one, the nation lifted hands and voices, basking in the protective shelter of the One True God.”
- “Others began to point and gawk in silent wonder as the alley between walls of water began to widen. The wind blew violently, remarkably, precisely. Miriam closed her eyes, letting herself feel the wind, Yahweh’s touch—like an impassioned Lover, determined to rescue His people.”



## What sets our God apart from other gods (besides a capital G)?

1. He chose to make a covenant with mankind –
  - **Genesis 12:1-3** – “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”
2. He took on our flesh and blood, our pain and sorrow –
  - **Isaiah 53:4-6** – “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”
  - **Hebrews 2:14, 17-18** – “Since therefore the children share in the flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things... Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”
3. He was tempted, just as we are –
  - **Hebrews 4:15** – “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”
4. He experienced death, and returned to life –
  - **1 Corinthians 15:4, 17** – “...that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”
5. He appeased His own wrath, solved the problem of evil for us –
  - **Romans 5:6-11** – “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly...God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”
  - **John 3:16-17** – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”





Each of the quotations and the Scriptures in the gray box explore slightly different nuances to the very common barrier of faith: *What distinguishes your God from other gods? What can we know about supernatural activity?*

Some people are quick to notice that there is something “bigger” than them in the world, something “other” than them. But things can get tricky when we try to figure out exactly what that “other” is, what it looks like, and what it does. **Describe** your general response to supernatural activity. Is it something you expect? Is it something you believe in? What does it look like to you?

**Read Exodus 20:3-5, Deuteronomy 6:14-15, and Psalm 77:13.** What does the Bible say about the existence of other gods (and potentially other supernatural activity) in the world?

**Read 1 Peter 5:8 and Ephesians 6:12.** What further insight do these verses give us about the presence of supernatural activity in the world? Is it all good? Is it all God?

If there is both good and evil supernatural activity in the world, how can we know the difference? Are the differences between God and other gods (or devils) always clear?

**Read John 8:44, Acts 13:10, and Galatians 5:22-23.** What insight do these verses give us into the difference between the works of the devil and the works of God’s spirit? How might these characterizations help us distinguish between different kinds of supernatural activity in the world?



**How** have you known or seen God’s supernatural power on your behalf? How did you know it was God and not something else? What characteristics were present in the supernatural power?

In your practical, day-to-day life, do you tend to rely more on luck, chance, statistics, science, fortune, and beating the odds, or on God’s faithfulness and supernatural power acting on your behalf?

Why is it sometimes difficult to distinguish between “coincidence” and supernatural activity? **Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-12, Colossians 1:15-17, and James 4:13-15.** What insight do these verses give us about “coincidence” or “chance”? If God created all things (even thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities) and all things hold together in Him, do you think there is anything that happens by chance or outside of His will?

**What** did Miriam mean in the quotation from chapter 37 – “As long as he viewed Yahweh as the enemy or another capricious deity among Egypt’s many gods, his course would never be steady”? What kind of belief or what kind of God might be able to give us a steady course in life? **Read Hebrew 13:8, Psalm 62:5-8, and Matthew 7:24-27.**

**What** idea do these verses give you about God’s *steadying* nature?



## This Week's Faith Builders

This week, keep an eye out for God's supernatural activity in your life. Keep in mind **Galatians 5:22-23**, to remind you of what His presence might look like when it shows up.

Also, try to pay attention each day to what kinds of things you set your hope on...facts, statistics, science, medicine, luck, chance, coincidence, etc. If you find yourself consistently trusting in temporal things or lesser "gods," consider asking God to open your eyes to see *His* supernatural activity on your behalf and His sovereign power over all other powers.



## Scriptures to Build On

Use the space below each Scripture to note new insights prompted by today's study.

**Exodus 20:3-5** – “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God...”

**Deuteronomy 6:14-15** – “You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you – for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God – lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.”

**Psalms 77:13** – “Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?”

**1 Peter 5:8** – “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

**Ephesians 6:12** – “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”



**John 8:44** – “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

**Acts 13:10** – “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?”

**Galatians 5:22-23** – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

**1 Chronicles 29:10-12** – “Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are all power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.”

**Colossians 1:15-17** – “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”



**James 4:13-15** – “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’ – yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’”

**Hebrews 13:8** – “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

**Psalms 62:5-8** – “For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.”

**Matthew 7:24-27** – “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”



## About Mesu



Mesu grew up with a variegated Christian heritage. With grandparents from the Pilgrim Holiness, Nazarene, and Wesleyan Churches, her dad was a Quaker and mom charismatic. As you might imagine, God was a central figure in most family discussions, but theology was a battlefield and Scripture the weapon. As a rebellious teenager, Mesu rejected God and His Word, but discovered Jesus as a life-transforming Savior through the changed life of an old friend.

The desire for God's Word exploded with her new commitment, but devotional time was scarce due to the demands of two busy toddlers. So Mesu scoured the only two theology books available--children's Bible stories and her Bible. The stories she read to her daughters at night pointed her to the Bible passages she studied all day. She became an avid student of God's Word, searching historical and cultural settings as well as ancient texts and original languages.

Mesu and her husband Roy have raised those two daughters and are now enjoying grandkids, but Mesu's love for God's Word has never waned. She now writes biblical novels, rich with spiritual insight learned through fascinating discoveries in historical research.

Her first novel, *Love Amid the Ashes* (Revell), won the 2012 ECPA Book of the Year in the Debut Author Category. *Miriam* is Mesu's sixth biblical novel, and study materials for each book can be found on her website (see following pages for more information).

Roy and Mesu live in the Pacific Northwest with their Staffordshire terrier named Zeke, who keeps Mesu company while she writes. Zeke also enjoys watching movies, long walks by waterfalls, and sitting by the fireplace on rainy Northwest days.

Connect With Mesu: <http://www.mesuandrews.com/>

~ Or click any of the social media links below ~





## **Miriam: A Treasures of the Nile Novel:**



**Enter an exotic land where a cruel Pharaoh reigns, pagan priests wield black arts, and the Israelites cry out to a God they only think they know.**

*At eighty-six, Miriam had devoted her entire life to loving El Shaddai and serving His people as both midwife and messenger. Yet when her brother Moses returns to Egypt from exile, he brings a disruptive message. God has a new name – Yahweh – and has declared a radical deliverance for the Israelites. Miriam and her beloved family face an impossible choice: cling to familiar bondage or embrace uncharted freedom at an unimaginable cost. Even if the Hebrews survive the plagues set to turn the Nile to blood and unleash a maelstrom of frogs and locusts, can they weather the resulting fury of the Pharaoh?*

## **The Pharaoh's Daughter:**



**Fear is the most fertile ground for faith.**

*Anippe has grown up in the shadows of Egypt's good god Pharaoh, aware that Anubis, god of the afterlife, may take her or her siblings at any moment. She watched him snatch her mother and infant brother during childbirth, a moment which awakens in her a terrible dread of ever bearing a child. Now she is to become the bride of Sebak, a kind but quick-tempered Captain of Pharaoh Tut's army. In order to provide Sebak the heir he deserves and yet protect herself from the underworld gods, Anippe must launch a series of deceptions, even involving the Hebrew midwives—women ordered by Tut to drown the sons of their own people in the Nile.*

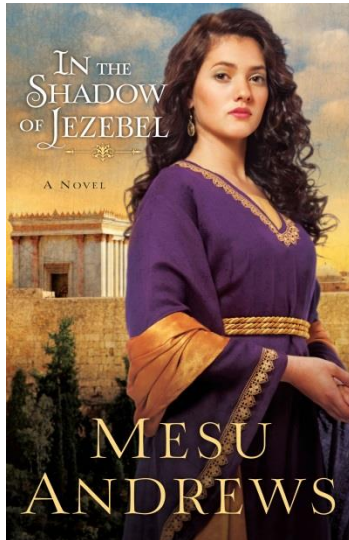
*When she finds a baby floating in a basket on the great river, Anippe believes Egypt's gods have answered her pleas, entrenching her more deeply in deception and placing her and her son Mehy, whom handmaiden Miriam calls Moses, in mortal danger. As bloodshed and savage politics shift the balance of power in Egypt, the gods reveal their fickle natures and Anippe wonders if her son, a boy of Hebrew blood, could one day become king. Or does the god of her Hebrew servants, the one they call El Shaddai, have a different plan—for them all?*





## **In the Shadow of Jezebel:**

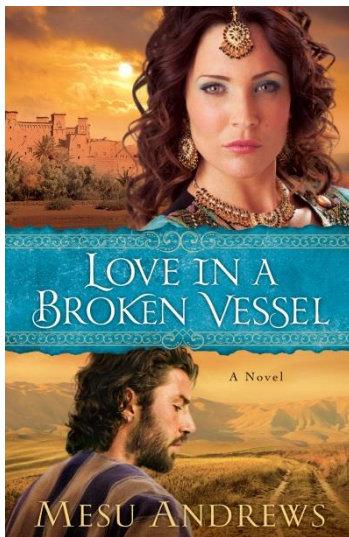
**In a kingdom controlled by cruel and manipulative women, one princess will discover the power of truth and love.**



*Trained as a priestess in the temple of Baal, Princess Jehosheba strives to please the demanding Queen Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel. But when a mysterious letter from the dead prophet Elijah predicts doom for the royal household, Jehosheba realizes that the dark arts she practices reach far beyond the realm of earthly governments. Forced to marry Yahweh's high priest in order to further Athaliah and Jezebel's power plays, Jehosheba enters the unfamiliar world of Yahweh's Temple. Can her new husband show her the truth and love she craves? And can Jehosheba overcome her fear and save the family--and the nation--she loves?*

## **Love In a Broken Vessel:**

**Book Trailer:** [http://www.youtube.com/embed/nI5Cav\\_ApPI?rel=0](http://www.youtube.com/embed/nI5Cav_ApPI?rel=0)

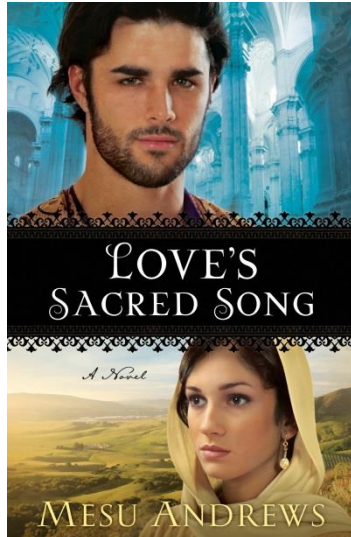


**While unfaithful Israel breaks God's heart, Gomer's broken spirit tests Hosea's faith—an epic journey of intimacy, rejection, and betrayal.**

*Deserted by those who love her and betrayed by the gods she once worshiped, Gomer lives a bitter existence...until one day her childhood friend reappears—Hosea. But is it too late for Gomer? Is her heart too broken to capture even a drop of love? While unfaithful Israel breaks God's heart, Gomer's broken spirit tests Hosea's faith. Can the two find faith in Yahweh's power to love?*

## **Love's Sacred Song:**

**Book Trailer:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYCpTmNVCQo>

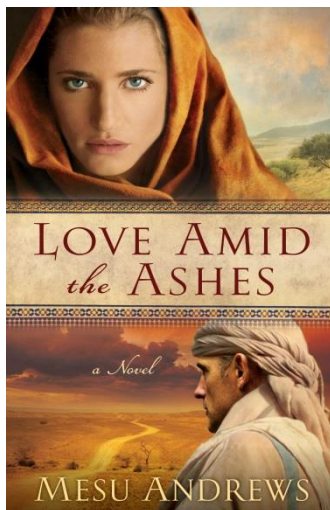


**For young King Solomon wisdom came as God's gift, but sacred love was forged through passion's fire.**

*Standing in the overpowering shadow of his famous father, young king Solomon wavers between fear and bravado, longing for a love that is true and pure—a love that can be his cornerstone. A shepherdess in the northern city of Shunem, Arielah has known since she first laid eyes on Solomon that it was her destiny to become his bride. When her father secures a promise from King Solomon to marry Arielah as a treaty bride to help unite the kingdom, it seems her dreams will come true. But how can this simple shepherdess live as part of Solomon's harem? Can Solomon set aside his distractions to give himself completely to just one woman? Or will he let duty, deception, and the daily routine divide his heart?*

## **Love Amid the Ashes:**

**Book Trailer:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxDLz8vLdfw>



**A breathtaking novel of Job's life through the eyes of the women who loved him.**

*When scandal and murder rock Dinah's life, the daughter of the great patriarch Jacob is sent away to Job's household. After Job's own world comes crashing down, Dinah finds herself drawn to this great man brought low. What will she risk to fight for his survival? Read this emotional and stirring account of Job and Dinah. Love Amid the Ashes breathes life, romance, and passion into the classic biblical story of suffering and steadfast faith.*