



The Mothers of Moses

Jochebed

HER NAME MEANS

“The Lord Is Glory”

HER CHARACTER: Her fierce love for her son, coupled with her faith, enabled her to act heroically in the midst of great oppression.

HER SORROW: To live in bondage as a slave.

HER JOY: That God not only preserved the son she surrendered to him but that he restored her child to her.

KEY SCRIPTURES: Exodus 2:1–10; Hebrews 11:23

Pharaoh’s Daughter

HER CHARACTER: The Jewish people honor men and women whom they designate as “righteous Gentiles.” These are people who, though nonbelievers, have assisted God’s people in some significant way. Surely, Pharaoh’s daughter should top the list of righteous Gentiles, courageously and compassionately delivering a child from death, a child who would one day act as Israel’s great deliverer.

HER SORROW: That her adopted son, whom she had taken care of for forty years, had to flee his home in Egypt in order to escape Pharaoh’s wrath.

KEY SCRIPTURE: Exodus 2:1–10

Three hundred years after the death of the patriarch Joseph, a baby boy was born in Egypt, his lusty cries muffled by a woman's sobs. Jochebed's heart was a tangle of joy and fear. This son, his fingers forming a tiny fist against her breast, was so striking a child she hardly believed he was hers. Tenderly she raised the small hand to her mouth, pressing its warmth to her lips. Her gesture calmed them both. She could feel the stiffness in her back dissolving, her muscles relaxing as she watched the night shadows evaporate in the morning's light.

Slave though she was, she was yet a Levite, a woman who belonged to the God of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac and Rebekah, of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah. She knew the stories. She believed the promises. God was faithful. Hadn't her people already grown as numerous as the sand of the sea, just as he said they would?

In fact, the Israelites were so numerous that the pharaohs feared they might one day welcome an invading army and betray the nation from within. Over time, the Egyptians had tightened their grip, finally enslaving the Israelites, until Pharaoh's paranoia produced an even greater evil—a command to murder each Hebrew male child emerging from the womb. But the Hebrew midwives feared God more than the king and refused to follow his orders, excusing themselves by claiming that Hebrew women were stronger than Egyptian women, giving birth before the midwives even arrived.

So Pharaoh commanded his soldiers to search out and smother every newborn male in the waters of the Nile. Jochebed could hear the screams of the mothers echoing regularly across the Hebrew camp as their children were torn from them. Her arms tightened around her own child as he slept quietly against her breast. This one, she vowed, would never be fodder for the Egyptian river god. She and her husband, Amram, would pray. They would plan. And they would trust God to help them.

For three months, as long as she dared, she hid the infant, managing to keep Miriam and three-year-old Aaron quiet about their new baby brother. Finally, she acted on an idea that had been growing in her mind. Pharaoh had commanded her to consign her son to the Nile River. All right then. Her own hands would put him into the water.

Remembering how God had spared the child Isaac on the mountain of sacrifice, she bent down and laid her son in a basket of papyrus, waterproofed with tar and pitch. Then, with a whispered prayer and a last caress, she wiped her eyes, begging God to preserve her baby from the crocodiles that swarmed the river.

She could not bear to watch as the child drifted away from her. Instead, young Miriam kept vigil, following at a distance to see what would become of him.

Soon Pharaoh's daughter arrived at the riverbank with some of her attendants. Spotting the basket among the reeds, she sent her slave girl to fetch it. As soon as she beheld the brown-eyed baby, she loved him. The river had brought her a child whom she would cherish as her own. She could not save all the innocent children, but she could spare one mother's son.

Was she surprised when a young slave girl, Miriam, approached, asking whether she could go after a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby for her? Did she suspect the truth when Jochebed gathered the boy in her arms, this time as his nursemaid?

Whatever was in her mind, Pharaoh's daughter named the child Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water." For the next forty years, she educated him, a prince in the courts of Pharaoh himself.

God kept Moses safe in the midst of extraordinary evil and danger—first in crocodile-infested waters and then when he was growing up right under Pharaoh's nose. And he used the Egyptians to protect and educate him in ways that must have made Moses even more effective in his eventual role as his people's deliverer.

Year after year, Jochebed would surely have reflected on the marvelous faithfulness of God. Her ingenuity, courage, and faith should inspire even the most weak-kneed among us.

Two women—a slave and a princess—preserved the life of Israel's future deliverer and so preserved the entire Jewish race.

BASKETS

Such an ordinary object, used to such extraordinary purpose. Imagine with what love and care Jochebed coated the papyrus basket with tar and pitch before placing her precious son within it. Few baskets throughout the centuries likely received as loving and careful a touch.

Baskets were just one of the many types of vessels used to store and carry various items in the ancient world. In the home, women used baskets to store household items as well as fruit and bread. Brick makers carried their clay in baskets. Travelers used them to carry the supplies they needed for their journey. Priests in Israel used baskets to store the bread and wafers that were a part of worship in the tabernacle (Exodus 29:3, 23, 32).

Typically made from some sort of plant material—leaves, twigs, or stalks—baskets came in a variety of shapes and sizes. The smallest could be carried in one hand. Baskets just a bit larger were carried on the back or on the head and were often used to hold provisions on a trip. The disciples used twelve of these large baskets to gather up the leftovers at the feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14:20). An even larger basket was used to let Paul escape out of a window in the wall at Damascus (Acts 9:25), so it must have been quite large and sturdy.

God's use of the ordinary to bring about the extraordinary is as much in evidence here in the early events of Exodus as anywhere in Scripture. His tendency to bring about his will through ordinary items, ordinary people, and ordinary events is no less at work today than it was in Jochebed's time. If you look for the signs of his presence, you are sure to discover them.

THEIR LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

Read Exodus 2:1-2

1. In your own words describe the events of these two verses. Look behind the scenes. How do you think the family kept the baby quiet? If a close neighbor heard the newborn's cries, what do you think he or she would have done? What if that neighbor had herself just a newborn to Pharaoh's decree? Why at three months could Jochebed "hid him no longer"? _____

2. How do you think you would have reacted in these circumstances? Like Jochebed? Like the other mothers? _____

3. What can you learn about Jochebed as a person from what she does at each point in this story? _____

Read Exodus 2:3-4

4. The events here go straight to a mother's heart. How do you think Jochebed felt as she walked away from the river? _____

5. Why do you suppose her father (and possibly her husband, if she had one) let Pharaoh's daughter break the law and adopt this foreign baby? _____

Read Exodus 2:5-6

6. Pharaoh's daughter, a member of the royal family, part of the race that was oppressing the Israelites, now enters the picture. What is most obvious about her from the verses? _____

7. Why do you suppose she was allowed to disobey her father's harsh edict? _____

Read Exodus 2:7-10

8. Compare verses 9 and 10. What conflicting emotions do you think Jochebed must have felt?

Read Exodus 2:10

9. What is the significance of the words “he (Moses) became her son”? _____

10. What purpose of God was at work here? _____

11. Why do you think Pharaoh’s daughter wanted to keep the baby as her own? _____

12. Where was God in this story? What does this say about God in your story? _____

Read Hebrew 11:23

13. This verse says that Moses’ mother and father acted “by faith”. Their one goal was to protect and save their child. Fear for our children’s safety – for their spiritual and physical lives – seems to be an inescapable part of parenting. What part does faith play in child rearing? What is your greatest fear for your child? How can you “by faith” respond to your fears? In what ways have you had to choose between faith and fear as a mother? _____

THEIR PROMISE

*M*oses' mother, Jochebed, had one thing in mind when hiding her son and leaving him in a basket in the river. Her goal was to preserve his life for one more day, one more hour, one more moment. She could not have known how God planned to work in her life or in the life of her son. Nor did she realize he was putting into place a divine plan to rescue his people from the very oppression she was resisting.

God's ways are beautiful in the extreme. He uses the devoted, intense love of a mother for her child to bring freedom to an entire race. Like Jochebed, our goal should be to hang on, trusting that God has his own purpose at work and that we and our children are part of it.

Promises in Scripture

*The plans of the LORD stand firm forever,
the purposes of his heart through all generations....
The eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love.*

—PSALM 33:11, 18

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD.

—JEREMIAH 29:11–14

THEIR LEGACY OF PRAYER

When she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.

—EXODUS 2:3

- REFLECT ON: Exodus 2:1–10.
- PRAISE GOD: That even the worst enemies we encounter are weak compared to him.
- OFFER THANKS: For God's power to save.
- CONFESS: Any failure to trust God for the lives of our children.
- ASK GOD: To help you be an encouragement to another mother who is concerned about her children's well-being.

Lift Your Heart

*F*ind another mother, perhaps a teenage mom or a friend who is having difficulty with her own children right now. Put together a gift basket for her, filled with small gifts like a scented candle, dried fruit, a coffee cup, and some small cards inscribed with encouraging Scripture verses. Tell her you will be praying for each of her children by name every day for the next couple of months. Don't expect her to confide in you, but if she does, cherish what she tells you by keeping it confidential and letting it shape your prayers.

Father, thank you for the gift and calling of motherhood. Help me to remember that my love for my children is merely a reflection of your own love for them. With that in mind, give me grace to surrender my anxiety. Replace it with a sense of trust and calm as I learn to depend on you for everything. Amen.