



JOCHEBED AND MIRIAM

(Genesis 37, Genesis 39–45:15,
Exodus 1–4:17, Exodus 15:20–21)

A DARK WORLD

The book of Genesis is full of mothers! From Eve to Sarah to Rebekah to Rachel and Leah, motherhood plays a key role in the early stories of the Bible. But we rarely see these mothers interacting with their children—and of the mothers who are named in Genesis, Leah is the only one whom the Bible mentions as having a daughter. Not until we get to Exodus do we meet the first mother/daughter pair we see interacting with each other in Scripture—Jochebed and Miriam. In a way, they are the only mother/daughter pair we include in these pages. The others we will journey along with in this book are related by marriage (Ruth and Naomi) or by cousinhood (Elizabeth and Mary).

When we venture into the extraordinary book of Exodus, we see the full power and beauty of the mother/daughter bond—just as the book of Exodus shows us the magnitude of God's relationship with His people, Israel. The wisdom of the Bible reveals both of these miracles for us together, and the story of God's intimate relationship with His people—not just Abraham and his family,

or Jacob and his sons, but also the Israelite people as a whole—begins here, with the loving bond between mother and daughter at the beginning of an extraordinary story.

Genesis shows us how Jacob's twelve sons grew to become a distinct people with their own customs and identity. Exodus takes us the next step, showing us how the Israelites then entered into relationship with God, not as individuals, but as a group: as the newly formed people of God. Exodus is about the birth of Israel as a nation, and at the very start of this divine adventure we meet Jochebed and Miriam. It is through the bravery and sacrifice of this mother and daughter that the entire story of Scripture begins to unfold. What a gift God gives us in the biblical account marked by the faith, creativity, and courage of these two women!

But before we dive in, let's take a look back. Hundreds of years before Jochebed and Miriam arrived on the scene, the Israelites came to Egypt in a time of crisis. Their journey was enabled by a great man, a "chosen one" who had to go into exile and rise to power in a foreign land before he was finally in place to save Israel.

It all started with a serious case of sibling rivalry. Though Jacob had many sons, Joseph was the offspring of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel. But there were eleven other sons, both from Jacob's other wife (and Rachel's sister), Leah, as well as sons born to Rachel's and Leah's servants—as was customary at the time. That Jacob favored Joseph over all his brothers was no secret; he even made his favorite son a special robe to wear. Here's how that overt favoritism went over with Joseph's older siblings:

When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. (Genesis 37:4)

Joseph must have been fully aware of both his favored position and his brothers' jealousy over it. Yet, when he had dreams that seemed to signal an even further elevation of his status, he didn't hesitate to share them.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. (Genesis 37:5-11)

Talk about not being able to read the room. Maybe Joseph spoke in humble confidence that the messages were not his, but divine in nature. In any case, his brothers were not enthused!

Things became so contentious that the brothers began to plot against Joseph, which was easy to do, since they were out in remote fields tending their herds. Barely restraining themselves

from killing him, they instead trapped Joseph in an empty cistern when he came out to visit them. As the brothers ate their dinner, a group of traveling merchants headed to Egypt happened by. So, rather than murder Joseph, his brothers decided to sell him into slavery, and the travelers took him with them to Egypt. To round out their deception, the brothers slaughtered a goat and dipped Joseph's ornate robe in the blood, taking it back to their father. Jacob believed his beloved Joseph had been killed by a "ferocious animal" (Genesis 37:33) and fell into deep grief.

Did any of Jacob's sons concoct this deceptive plan ever buckle under the guilt of what they'd done? Did they have regrets when they saw how heartbroken their father, Jacob, was? Whether they did—or didn't—wrestle with their treachery, Joseph's story was really just beginning. Once he reached Egypt, he was sold to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's most esteemed officials. Joseph rose in prominence because of his trustworthiness and integrity.

From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. (Genesis 39:5-6)

But there was trouble on the horizon. Potiphar's wife had noticed Joseph too, and she regularly tried to seduce him. Day after day, Joseph refused.

My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9)

Yet Potiphar's wife continued her advances, and on a day when they were all alone, she called to him again. Joseph refused again and ran away from her so quickly that he left his cloak behind, and Potiphar's wife took full advantage of that—framing him for attempted rape. Despite what Potiphar knew about Joseph's character, he believed his wife's story and Joseph was thrown in jail.

It's easy to see how bitterness might have taken hold in Joseph's heart at this point. The most favored son in a flourishing family, he seemed to be heading for greatness—then he faced a series of advances and setbacks, and must have, in the moment, felt like there was no plan or purpose after all. He was nearly killed by his own brothers. Then his brothers sold him into slavery, but he was so honorable that he rose to the top of a prominent Egyptian household. We see no indication that Joseph had dishonored the Lord or sinned, yet he was once again imprisoned and forgotten—but he was not forgotten by God. Despite his circumstances, Joseph once again lived with virtue.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. (Genesis 39:20-22)

Thrown into one disastrous predicament after another, Joseph over and over again chose integrity and service to others.

That included the king's cupbearer and baker, who had angered their leader and wound up behind bars themselves.

This is where Joseph's ability to interpret dreams showed up again, a gift from God that would guide Joseph time and again. In prison, both the cupbearer and baker had vivid dreams, and as they searched for someone to interpret them, Joseph humbly said God could do that through him. Joseph's interpretations were good news for the cupbearer, that he would return to his position. But the baker's dream foretold his death. Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him when he was released (as predicted), but the man did not . . . at least not for quite some time.

Years later, Pharaoh had two dramatic dreams of his own. As he searched for someone to explain them, that cupbearer remembered his debt to Joseph and told Pharaoh about his abilities. Joseph was quickly retrieved from the dungeon where he'd been imprisoned and called before Pharaoh.

"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." (Genesis 41:16)

Pharaoh shared his peculiar dream, and led by God, Joseph predicted a cycle of seven years of abundance for Egypt followed by seven years of great famine. Joseph counseled Pharaoh to find a "discerning and wise man" to put in charge of Egypt's land and to manage the coming trouble (Genesis 41:33). Guess who, despite years of slavery and unjust captivity, was chosen to become only second to Pharaoh in all the land?

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as

you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you." (Genesis 41:39-40)

Talk about redemption! Joseph's early dreams had put a target on his back, but his willingness to be God's messenger for the cupbearer, baker, and then Pharaoh changed everything—not only for him, but also for the nation of Israel to come.

It is easy to doubt God's plan and provision when we are struggling. I can only imagine how Joseph must have felt at times: despondent, wrongfully accused, and stripped of his most basic human rights. It must have felt doubly confusing after the prophecies of his childhood. I believe there is purpose in our pain, the twists and turns we didn't see coming in our journey, the things we would never willingly choose to face. In all of Joseph's story we never see him lashing out at God or denouncing his reliance on Him. If anything, we see him take every opportunity to turn potential earthly glory away from himself and directly to his heavenly Father.

The amazing story that unfolds from this point is one for the ages. As God guided Joseph to predict, Egypt had years of great bounty. Joseph oversaw the efforts to collect and save the surplus, which would sustain the people through the desperate years of crushing famine that followed. When that happened, people came from around the region seeking help—including Joseph's long-estranged brothers. In Genesis 42-45, you can read the astonishing story of Joseph's ability to provide for the very brothers who schemed to get rid of him forever. It had been so long since their cruelty to Joseph that they didn't even realize the man standing before them was their own flesh and blood.

When Joseph finally revealed his identity to his brothers, he didn't take a victory lap. I'm not gonna lie; I suspect I would have been lacing up my sneakers! *Just make them sweat for a bit. You DESERVE an apology!* Instead, we once again see the humble man of God Joseph had proven to be.

And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. (Genesis 45:5-8)

In other words, Joseph was saying, *Guyz, I know you tried to make sure you'd never see me again. It's okay! God had this whole thing planned. It's not your fault.*

Not only was Joseph in a position to save his family, but he also had such enormous favor with Pharaoh that his entire family was able to move and settle into "the best part of the land" (Genesis 47:11). That's how the nation of Israel began her centuries of residence in Egypt, with Joseph celebrated and revered. The Israelites flourished for hundreds of years, but by the time of Jochabed and Miriam, this success was seen as a threat to the Egyptian leadership.

Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country."

So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with harsh labor. (Exodus 1:8-14)

The integrity and humility of Joseph, which had saved the Egyptian people, was now nothing but a distant memory, and the reality for Jochabed and Miriam was one of brutal slavery and zero freedom. The people of Israel had gone from being honored guests in Egypt to resented foreigners to enslaved outsiders. But as we'll see, the story of Joseph and the story of Moses have more than a few parallels.

It's within this oppressive existence that we find the Israelites multiplying so quickly that Pharaoh hatched a murderous plan. He called in the Hebrew midwives and told them plainly: if a Hebrew woman gave birth to a girl, they could let the baby live; but they were to kill any male baby who came along. It's possible the midwives could have lied to the mothers, and in that world of high infant mortality an accidental newborn death would have been believable. Pharaoh's plan, for all its diabolical

cal evil, was a sound one. But these women of valor decided not to go along.

The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. (Exodus 1:17)

By the way, Pharaoh noticed that the Hebrews continued to have male babies—and that they were living. He demanded an explanation.

The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. (Exodus 1:19-20)

So Pharaoh moved on to plan B. He commanded that every male child born into a Hebrew family was to be thrown into the Nile River.

It is nearly too painful to picture the horror of a newborn baby being thrown into a river to drown—no exceptions, no hope. Imagine being a Hebrew mother, awaiting the day of her child's birth—knowing that a girl would live (though probably in lifelong servitude or slavery) and a boy would be killed. It was in this dark world that Jochebed became pregnant with Moses. I wonder what conversations she might have had with young Miriam about her pregnancy and the danger the growing baby could face. Even though she lived in a culture of oppression and poverty and fear, Jochebed had a family. There is something

very hopeful about the fact that the Hebrew people continued to thrive despite near-constant persecution. We often see that when God's people are in the crucible of suffering they grow—in deeper commitment and often in number.

When Jochebed delivered Moses, Scripture makes clear he was special. We're told in Exodus 2:2 that Jochebed "saw that he was a fine child." Let's unpack two things here. First, the original word for *saw* indicates something more complex. Jochebed had a deeper perception—possibly a vision—about the child she had just given birth to. It was something more than just looking upon her precious child with adoration. As for the words *a fine child*, we see that concept repeated in the New Testament references to Moses: "At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child" (Acts 7:20) and "they saw he was no ordinary child" (Hebrews 11:23).

A prophetic vision of the great destiny of a child happens again and again in the Bible. Joseph was special because he was the first child of the formerly barren Rachel. But Joseph was also given a prophetic glimpse into his future. It seems that this loving slave woman Jochebed was given similar divine insight about her baby boy, and it gave her courage. Not only did Jochebed recognize that her son was unique, but that awareness also gave her the strength to resist the command to take his life. Instead, she hid him for three months.

This mother was courageous *and* crafty. When she realized she could no longer conceal Moses, Jochebed coated a basket with tar and pitch, essentially making a baby ark for him. She made a plan and used the resources she had. Jochebed placed the basket among the reeds on the bank of the Nile River—the very place she'd been commanded to send her baby to die. She

knew Moses had a special destiny, so to give him a chance at that life, Jochebed let her infant son go. The word for this basket is the same used to describe Noah's ark in Genesis 6. What a striking parallel! In both situations, water could destroy and take life, and in both stories we see God's provision for survival through these unique vessels. In both cases, human hands worked to craft God's means of escape—preserving His people for great plans ahead.

With Moses tucked into Jochebed's "ark" and placed along the banks of the Nile, her daughter—Moses's big sister—Miriam stood watch nearby, as the Lord provided a miracle.

Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent 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. (Exodus 2:5-6)

Whatever the edict Pharaoh had laid down for the destruction of Hebrew sons, it appears his daughter's heart was filled with compassion instead. And Miriam was there to leverage that kindness!

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. (Exodus 2:7-9)

In this scene, Miriam did two incredibly brave things. First, she stepped forward and addressed Pharaoh's daughter, a child putting herself squarely before one of the most powerful people in Egypt. She abandoned the safety of her hiding spot. She could have stayed put in a hidden place, and then, when the coast was clear, run back to her mother to tell her the good news. That would have been a happy ending. But Miriam didn't do that. Instead, she did a second brave thing: she spoke up and offered a solution that would either expose her family's secret or buy them more time with this vulnerable baby.

It is breathtaking to think about the risks Miriam took. She must have observed the princess long enough to be reasonably sure she would not ask probing questions about how that baby wound up there along the Nile, but it was still a risk. What if her mother was subjected to questioning about the baby? Or if Miriam herself was? Apparently, Miriam didn't stop to think about any of that. She saw a way to reunite her young brother with his devoted mother, keeping him safe and their family together. What a paradox that Pharaoh's plan was to subdue the Hebrew people by killing their sons, and it turns out a group of females thwarted his plan. Jochebed fought to save her son. Miriam boldly stepped up to protect him. Then Pharaoh's own daughter took pity on him and spared his life!

Can you imagine the weeping, the rejoicing, the laughter, maybe even dancing that must have happened in Moses's modest home that night? Could there have been anyplace in Egypt filled with more joy than the humble house of slaves whose child had just been restored to them? The faith and courage of this mother/daughter team put them in place to be ready for the miracle God delivered. Sometimes we, too, are called into action in

a way that may seem strange to the world around us. If we are proceeding in God's will, then we can trust His guidance as modeled by Moses's parents. They were so confident in the favor of God on their son that "they were not afraid of the king's edict" (Hebrews 11:23). What a beautiful place we find ourselves in when we rest secure in the knowledge that God has the situation firmly in His hands.

Jochebed, having acted in obedience and faith, then had the blessing of raising her own son—rather than mourning his death. Per the custom of the time, it's likely she nursed and nurtured him for at least two to three years. Think of the wisdom and knowledge she poured into this young child, firmly rooting him in the ways and traditions and beliefs of the Hebrew people. All along, God was scripting Moses's story, equipping and preparing him to be uniquely qualified and positioned to save the entire nation of Israel. Jochebed's life is a perfect example of the impact and eternal importance of motherhood. The spiritual foundation she laid during her son's most formative years would make all the difference decades later, when Moses struggled with and then ultimately followed God's calling on his life. Jochebed also raised Miriam, who became a prophetess and leader among her people, and Aaron, who was the founder of Israel's priesthood. Their home must have been filled with deep reverence and commitment to the God of their fathers. Together, this trio of siblings would lead their people to freedom under God's direction and protection.

After Jochebed had the miraculous opportunity to raise her young son, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter. We don't know what Jochebed named her baby boy, but his adoptive mother gave him the name Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water"

(Exodus 2:10). And because God is always doing the unexpected, this is not the story of a young prince raised as a slave, but of the slave raised as a young prince. God elevated the young boy born into slavery to a palace instead. When Jochebed lay in her bed at night dreaming of a happy ending for her beloved little baby, could she have envisioned something this phenomenal? Maybe she actually did! We know she saw something exceptional in her newborn son, enough to make her so bold as to disobey Pharaoh's order to kill him. Perhaps Jochebed's faith buoyed her with the assurance that God would protect and prepare this child for big things in the years to come.

Mothers across the ages have prayed over their children, asking God to protect and guide them. Few would dare to imagine that their three children would grow up to lead a nation, but that's exactly what happened to the family of Jochebed.

But it's also critical to remember that Moses, the man who led Israel out of slavery in Egypt, spent decades running from his ultimate destiny in a way that would break any mother's heart. The tragedy started when Moses tried to become his people's savior too early. We don't know much about his years growing up as part of Pharaoh's household, but we do know that he clearly identified with his Hebrew brothers and sisters when it came to their ongoing struggle. What's not apparent is how they viewed him. He'd been raised in a palace by the enemy. Did Moses have an overly confident view of his role as the potential "savior" of a people he may not have truly understood or fully identified with? In Exodus 2, we see him not only observing the harsh labor conditions the Hebrews were under but also witnessing something even more egregious—and committing a crime of his own.

He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?"

The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known." (Exodus 2:11-14)

Moses's desire to save his people is understandable. After hundreds of years, Joseph's adventures must have become the stuff of legend to an enslaved people, the sort of story you tell around the campfire at night to wondering children. To Moses, a slave elevated to being a prince, it probably seemed like a reflection of his own life! Surely, it felt like God had placed him in the ideal position to save Israel from their harsh treatment. But God's plans were quite different. We can't know what was going through Moses's head when he killed the Egyptian, but it must have been a devastating blow to realize that not only were his people not falling in line—accepting him as a leader—but that his crime was the subject of gossip. He'd been betrayed by the people he saw as his own. In a moment, all his privilege—and his seeming golden future—was stripped away.

Like Joseph "the dreamer," Moses was about to be wrenched away from what seemed like a settled destiny. God was sending His chosen one into the wilderness, where he would be prepared for a role he didn't expect at all.

This must have been devastating for Jochebed. Like Mary weeping for Jesus, Moses's mother must have been devastated by her son's exile. Moses, Jochebed's son, the one she gazed upon after his birth with certainty about his favored destiny, was now a murderer who would soon be on the run. His sin was no secret, and Pharaoh was so furious we're told "he tried to kill Moses" (Exodus 2:15). Moses took off, armed with plenty of reasons to abandon Egypt for good. For decades following his decision to flee, he built a life in the wilderness, away from both the royal life he'd enjoyed and the plight of the oppressed Hebrew people.

Surely, Jochebed heard of what had happened with her son, that he was guilty of taking another's life. Did she wonder how this played into the plans God had for him? I imagine Jochebed prayed for her son all the years he was being educated and raised at the palace. It would only make sense she would continue to pray while he was on the run, far from home, building a completely different life from what she'd probably thought he would.

I know many women who began praying for their children long before they were even pregnant, asking God to draw them close to Him and to watch over them. When I was in college, I used to go on training flights with a friend who was building his hours as a pilot. It was a tiny plane, and the trips were short. I thought it was a fantastic opportunity, but I remember my mom saying to me, "Don't tell me when you're going; just let me know when you're back safe on the ground!" But I *wanted* my mom to know in advance. Why? Because she's a bona fide prayer warrior, and I knew she was always covering my adventures in prayer. How many mamas out there have burned the midnight oil, interceding for a child who's gone astray?

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.
(James 5:16)

And what a beautiful thing it is when all those prayers and the foundations mothers laid with those children ultimately bring them back home.

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

That's exactly what happened with Moses, but not without him running in the opposite direction of the destiny Jochebed saw for him from the very earliest days of his life.

While Moses was sprinting from his past, his people—the ones he left behind—were desperate for a different future.

The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.
(Exodus 2:23)

Exodus tells us that God heard their pleas and remembered the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And He was about to draft a very unwilling Moses to get the job of delivering the Israelites done. Before, Moses wanted to be a warrior savior, saving his people by the strength of his hand. But like Joseph, he had to go through a period of suffering—a “wilderness” period—when he had to rely on God and build a new life before he was offered the opportunity to be a liberator for his people. He must have thought he would be like Joseph at first: a kingly leader, perhaps second-in-command to Pharaoh like Joseph was,

but his privileged youth was a bit of narrative misdirection. It would be an elderly Moses, weather-beaten after years of labor as a shepherd, his youthful self-confidence shattered, who would take on the might of Egypt—with his words.

You've likely heard how the Lord got Moses's attention with a burning bush in the desert, something I believe would snap us all to attention. Look as God outlined His plan:

The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. (Exodus 3:7-9)

Okay, Moses may have been thinking, what exactly does this have to do with me? At that moment Moses was already hiding his face in fear. Then the special favor his mother, Jochebed, had seen decades before, which made her so certain about him that she defied a king, began to unfold.

So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt. (Exodus 3:10)

Excuse me? Long after Moses fled in guilt and fear, God was asking him to return to the scene of the crime. Not only that, but

he'd also be in charge of getting the entire Hebrew population out of Egypt.

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11)

This is where it gets good! Whenever God clearly directs us to take on a seemingly impossible task, we can rest in the knowledge that He's the one who's actually going to be getting the job done.

And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." (Exodus 3:12)

Moses wasn't quite convinced.

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" (Exodus 3:13)

Moses still remembered being rejected by his people. He was still the same loner kid, only now he didn't even have the privileges of his Egyptian childhood to insulate him from being forsaken by the Hebrews. In my head, I hear this next part in a booming, thunderous voice from heaven.

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:14)

The Lord God Almighty was not messing around. That special child Jochebed held in her arms eighty years earlier was about to fulfill his destiny, whether he felt ready or not. God gave Moses specific directions about exactly what to say and to whom. He told him to assemble the elders of Israel and let them know God had been watching over them all during their misery—and that good things were coming. The Lord assured Moses the elders would listen, but that's not the only speaking assignment he'd have. Moses was directed to go directly to Egypt's king and demand the Israelites be allowed to leave. Even after God showed him the incredible signs and wonders Moses would be able to perform in order to convince any doubters, Moses remained a doubter himself!

Moses said to the Lord, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

The Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

But Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else." (Exodus 4:10-13)

It's easy, isn't it, to look at Moses in judgment. How in the world could you have come face-to-face with God, be shown miracles, have His full backing, and say: *No thank you?* But I know I've done it myself! God was not pleased, but He reminded Moses about his eloquent brother, Aaron. Yes, another one of the trio of champions Jochebed raised. God told Moses, "I will help both of you speak and will teach you what do to" (Exodus 3:15).

What follows in the next several chapters is a roller-coaster ride of tragedy and triumph. Together, the brothers confronted Pharaoh as God poured out His judgment on the Egyptians over and over again. When the Israelites finally burst forth from Egypt, in the wake of incredible miracles and with unmistakable divine intervention, there was enormous celebration as the Red Sea split wide open for the Israelites to walk on dry land. Those waters then swallowed up the entire Egyptian army that had been pursuing them. And that's when we see the other member of the sibling trio alongside her brothers once again.

Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels 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."
(Exodus 15:20-21)

The brave little girl had grown into a history-making prophetess and leader. The wise daughter we watched skillfully navigate

her helpless infant brother to safety grew into a voice of God's prophecy and guidance for His people.

Again and again, we see that God highlights women and their roles in bringing about His bigger plans. Jochebed models faith for us. She was a woman so in tune with God that she was able to see an extraordinary vision for her son. That trust in God gave her the holy courage to defy an evil king's murderous order. She used what she had and released her precious baby to God's plan. It can be tough for us to surrender our loved ones to God, and Jochebed did it more than once.

I remember the excitement I felt going off to college as a seventeen-year-old freshman, so much so that I went the first two weeks without ever calling home. I think my mom was trying to give me space, but she finally broke down and called—letting me know in no uncertain terms that she expected her baby to check in on a more regular basis. I'd spent my senior year of high school itching to spread my wings, often clashing with my saint of a mother. But the truth was, I wasted many hours on campus at Liberty University fearing the worst. My parents were in Florida, twelve-plus hours away by car, and at least a connection or two via plane. Some nights I lay awake in bed wondering how quickly I could get home if something happened to them. It took up a lot of my mental space, but I finally realized it wasn't healthy. God never wants us to treasure His gifts to us more than Him, the Giver of those gifts. It's something I have to remind myself of regularly, and what better example than Jochebed?

What do we need to pack up in an ark and set free on the Nile? Is it social media, cultivating the perception of a perfect life? Maybe it's pursuing a relationship that's not meant to be, or chasing money and professional achievement. Maybe it's the

security of your position in church or the awards your kids are winning. It can be the way you judge someone else or the harsh self-talk tearing you down from inside. None of us is immune. Personally, I often have to do reality checks on what—or who—I may be elevating above God Himself. So, let's commit to packing that stuff in a basket and launching it out. We can trust that the Lord will honor our sacrifice.

Heavenly Father, grant us the fortitude to love and trust You as Jochebed and Miriam did. Help us to fully devote ourselves to Your will, knowing You alone search the depths of our hearts and are fully aware of the infusion of courage we need in order to follow You. Grant that we may always hope for a way out of darkness when our own eyes see none, and may our love be a light and a place of refuge for all those in need.

Jochebed and Miriam Study Questions

1. What did Jochebed risk in order to save Moses, and why was she willing to do it? (Exodus 2:2; Acts 7:20; Hebrews 11:23) Do you believe God can give a mother insight beyond what human eyes see on the surface? How can that propel the way she prays for and directs her child?
2. What feelings do you think Jochebed experienced when it was time to send Moses to Pharaoh's daughter? Has God ever asked you to release someone—or something—you loved dearly to His greater plan? How do you reason through those kinds of decisions?
3. For years, Moses was on the run, away from his family and struggling with the role God had planned for him. Have you ever shied away from something God called you to do? What do we know about God's ability to equip us to accomplish when He's asking us to step out in faith? (Exodus 3, 4) Have you ever tried to talk God out of something? Did you eventually see how His plan was better than yours?
4. Have you ever watched as a child or loved one seemed to get way off track? How do you pray for or counsel them while you wait and hope they return?

5. Miriam, Aaron, and Moses were key leaders in Israel's escape from slavery. What does it say about Jochebed that she raised these three siblings who ultimately found their way back to each other to accomplish God's miracles? They were flawed, and prove that sibling rivalry was alive and well in biblical times. (Numbers 12) How does their story illustrate God's ability to work through flawed people?



RUTH AND NAOMI

(Book of Ruth)

NAOMI THE MOTHER

In *Women of the Bible Speak*, we considered Ruth's life in connection with the life of Tamar—another woman who knew what it was to be an outcast and a stranger, someone people despised and perhaps pitied. We saw beauty come from the mess that Tamar made when God redeemed her mistakes and wove her story into the lineage of Jesus Christ. In this book, we're going to view Ruth through the lens of being a daughter and the relationship she built with the woman who became her second mother, Naomi. Their journey together began in shared grief, but resulted in deep joy and deliverance. It started in earnest when Ruth took a true leap of faith, a bold step that led her away from her family of birth but into the promises of God and a new family.

Again and again in Scripture, we see examples of "found families." Adoption is a theme God beautifully illustrates for us repeatedly in the Bible, leading up to the adoption of Christians as sons and daughters of God.

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those