

EVERY WOMAN IN THE BIBLE

JOCHEBED

Jochebed's role in Scripture:

Scripture references:

Exodus 2:1-10; 6:20

Numbers 26:59.

Birth date: About 1525 B.C.

**Name: Jochebed (Jah-kuh-bed).
("Yahweh is glory")**

Major

Contribution: The mother and nurse of Moses, who taught him to love God and be loyal to his own people.

Jochebed's Role in Scripture

Jochebed is named only in two genealogies, where she is identified as the mother of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Undoubtedly her most significant role was in the early shaping of her son Moses, a dominant figure throughout the Old Testament.

From her faith in things unseen, Jochebed gained her strength and force. A mother who had learned to trust her Creator and not to doubt, she seemed to be united to the promises of God, absorbed by them and exhilarated by them.

Her whole background speaks of her holiness, the kind that strengthens faith. She was the daughter of Levi (Num. 26:59), born in Egypt, and she became the wife of Amram, grandson of Levi, son of Jacob. The Levites were charged with the care of the sanctuary. Jochebed handed down this priestly tradition of her family to her children. Her son Aaron was set apart to be a priest and became the center and founder of the Hebrew priesthood, which he served for almost forty years. Her daughter Miriam led the Israelites in a moment when their faith came alive as they crossed the Sea of Reeds.

Jochebed was a Hebrew woman in Egypt, a member of a slave race. At that time Pharaoh had commanded that all boys born to Hebrews should be thrown in the Nile. As the mother of Moses, Hebrew lawgiver, statesman and leader, Jochebed rises up today, some thirty-three centuries later, as one of the immortal mothers of Israel. Interesting to notice is that three times, the Scriptures tell us that even when he was a tiny baby there was something special about Moses. In Exodus 2:2 he is called a "fine child"; in Acts 7:20 and Hebrews 11:23 he is described as "no ordinary child".

Jochebed had some of the qualities of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who recognized that her baby was destined by God for some special purpose. Like Mary, Jochebed must also have seen or felt indications of her child's high destiny and "pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). And Jochebed, as was Mary, was willing to suppress her own maternal love and to dedicate her son to that which he had been called by God.

It was probably near Memphis in northeast Egypt that Jochebed gave birth to Moses, in the second half of the second millennium B.C. There have been other suggestions that Levi's daughter Jochebed was more likely an ancestress of Moses rather than his own mother, for many generations must have intervened between the arrival of Jacob's twelve sons in Egypt and the birth of Moses. But like the birthplace and first names of mothers of many great men who rise up out of obscurity, this mother of Moses did not achieve importance until decades or maybe centuries, later. By this time it was difficult to trace many of the facts centering around her life. But what does a first name matter for this mother of faith?

By name Jochebed is mentioned only twice in the Bible, but her eminence as a mother in Israel is not obscured. Though the meager record we have of her life concerns the first years of Moses' childhood, her greatness rises up like an imperishable monument. And though she is never vividly described, as are many of the great mothers in the Bible, Jochebed lives on because she walked humbly before her God and because she transmitted character to her son Moses, her daughter Miriam, and her older son

Aaron. She lives on too, not by how many big tasks she accomplished, but by how wisely and well she served as a mother.

At the time Jochebed gave birth to Moses, the Pharaoh had issued an edict to midwives to kill all Hebrew boys at birth. They were to be thrown into the Nile River. Moses had a natural birth, but the fact that he survived and grew up when all male Hebrew children were being destroyed is noteworthy. Pharaoh's orders were not unlike those of King Herod, who, many centuries later in the time of Jesus, ordered that all male children in Bethlehem two years or under be destroyed. In spite of this measure, which Pharaoh had taken for the destruction of a people, Israel's deliverance would eventually be accomplished.

How Jochebed managed to save her son from Pharaoh's edict during the first three months of Moses' life is not recorded. We can imagine she might have hidden him in a donkey stable or a storage room where she kept clay jars filled with grain, peppercorns, onions, bread, dates and other foods. But after he became three months old, she knew she could no longer take the risk of hiding him.

Through these three months of anxiety, we can be sure that she lived close to her God. He had endowed her with sufficient wisdom and ingenuity to conceal her son for three months. Now she knew that her God of infinite compassion would not forsake her. She had faith enough to enter upon a very dangerous plan. She was going to leave her baby in a handmade ark floating at the water's edge close to the dangerous current of the Nile River.

It must have taken a lot of courage and faith for her to weave by hand the ark of bulrushes out of the long, pliant, tenacious stems of the papyrus plant. This plant itself, she knew was a protection against crocodiles. She had positive faith that God would protect her child. And yet for Jochebed faith was accompanied by careful planning and work. She not only wove the ark but with her own hands plastered it inside with clay to make it smooth and outside with bitumen to make it watertight. Her faith was not without wisdom.

With the help of Miriam, she laid her baby amid the flowering flags near the river's bank and left this young girl near by to watch over her little brother. What could have calmed a mother's heart in an hour like this - but prayer? She surely had taught her daughter Miriam to pray also as she watched. Though Miriam deserves great credit, she was the pupil; Jochebed was the teacher. She remembered that Pharaoh's daughter was accustomed to coming down and bathing at this very spot.

Moses may have lain in that basket for a short time or even for hours before Pharaoh's daughter came down. We can be sure Jochebed was somewhere nearby with trusting faith that nothing adverse would happen to her son, and her faith was rewarded.

Pharaoh's daughter did appear with her maidens to bathe, right near the spot where little Moses lay in the reeds. When she came upon the ark partially hidden by the flags, she sent her maid to get it. (Exodus 2:5). Then she heard Moses crying. She turned to her maiden and said, "This is one of the Hebrew's children" (Exodus 2:6).

Miriam, not standing far away, was quick to act. "Shall I go and call a nurse of the Hebrew women, so she can nurse this child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter agreed and said "go".

Miriam went to Jochebed, who was not standing too far away, and gave her the joyful news that she could nurse her own child. Moses was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, but Jochebed watched over him until he was seven. She continued to instill the gentle character, and holiness, with a strong belief in God, Creator of heaven and earth, of man and beast, into Moses. She also told him of the sacred promises of God and the sacred traditions of Israel. She also told him of the Divine promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they would become a great nation.

This lowly Levite mother could rejoice that her son Moses, as the adopted son of the princess, would receive the best education available in a king's palace and could later have the privilege of boys of highest rank, and probably an education at Heliopolis, the Oxford of ancient Egypt.

In later years when the priests of Egypt would try to initiate her son into idolatry, he would remember his mother's God and her faith in Him. And he would remain a Hebrew at heart though all the years of his life. We can be quite sure that it was his mother's early influence that enabled Moses to make the decision to leave the court and go out among his own brethren and lift their burden, for from her he had inherited loyalty to his own race.

Whether Jochebed lived to see this or not, we have no record. By the time her son was seven years old, she had disappeared from the record. Probably she went back into obscurity of her own humble home to watch Moses' progress from afar. We do not know whether she saw him become a great leader, lawgiver, and prophet, but we do know she had the satisfaction of pouring great things into his mind and heart during those most formative years of his life. As we know, too that this mother of faith had instilled even greater faith in Moses and also in her two other children, Miriam and Aaron.

Exploring Jochebed's relationships:

The relationship of Jochebed and her husband: Jochebed was of the family of Levi, the third son of Leah and Jacob. She married

her brother Kohath's oldest son, Amram. They had three children. Miriam, Aaron and Moses, all of who distinguished themselves among God's chosen.

Jochebed's relationship with God: Jochebed, like most mothers, loved her children and did what she could to protect men. It's difficult to imagine living in a society where the government would order all boy babies to be killed. Jochebed, like the midwives Puah and Shiphrah, was a God-fearing woman who took desperate measures to protect her infant son.

Jochebed's relationship with Miriam: We don't know if Miriam was the oldest of Jochebed's children, but she may have been since she was given the important responsibility of watching over baby brother while he floated in a basket in the Nile. Some scholars have assumed that Miriam may have been around eight to ten years of age when she watched over baby brother. While today we might consider this child neglect, we must remember that thirteen was viewed as marriageable age.

Miriam, whatever her age, obeyed her mother and spent her time keeping close watch over the baby. Scripture does not reveal if the baby was found the first day afloat or if days or weeks went by while Miriam acted as sentinel. However long it was, Miriam honored her mother by being a responsible daughter and sister. Jochebed must have had a strong bond of trust with her daughter to give her this important responsibility.

Jochebed's relationship with Moses: Jochebed saw that Moses was a beautiful child and had him for three months. When she realized it would be too difficult to conceal him any longer, she devised a plan to hide him in a floating basket. It is like she knew that Pharaoh's daughter and her hand-maidens frequented that place on the Nile. Perhaps Jochebed thought that if she could just get Pharaoh's daughter to see her beautiful son that she too would want to protect him.

Her plan succeeded and, thanks to quick-thinking Miriam, Jochebed was able to continue nursing and nurturing her son and even was paid for it. She was his primary caregiver and influenced Moses for the first three to four years of his life. During these years Jochebed infused a lasting sense of identity with God's people in her son. Then she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. The princess called "his name Moses," saying, "Because I drew him out of the water".

To save his life Jochebed had to give up Moses to a foster mother. He became a murderer and a fugitive, escaping to the wilderness away from everything familiar to him. He lived in exile for forty years before God's time to use him arrived. It is probable that Jochebed was living when Moses fled to the wilderness. If so, she waited, and wondered, and prayed for her son, but never knew what special plans God had for him. Moses was eighty when God spoke to him from the burning bush. It is almost certain that Jochebed had died before Moses came out of exile. But God in His grace and in His time had an intimate and special relationship with Moses, as He had him lead His people out of bondage and through the wilderness for forty years before finally bringing them to the edge of the Promised Land.

Jochebed: An Example For Today: Jochebed's experiences show us that mothers need to be flexible and creative, especially during difficult circumstances!

Jochebed stands as a reminder to parents never to lose faith that God will work in the lives of their children. Most parents live to see this, but some, like Jochebed don't. How wonderful it is to understand that even after we aren't here to pray for our children God continues to answer our prayers.

Jochebed, like many mothers today, lovingly gave her child up for another to raise. God honored her by using her son for His Godly purposes. And God used all of Moses' circumstances to make him into the man He needed him to be.

Anymouse.