



JOCHEBED AND MIRIAM: WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF MOSES

INTRODUCTION

It was the worst of times; and yet, the best of times for the children of Israel. They were slaves in Egypt, a foreign land, far from their home; yet God was about to deliver them.

Sold into slavery by his brothers, Joseph, son of Jacob, became governor over Egypt. When a famine came over the land, Joseph, blessed by God's wisdom and in favour with Pharaoh, was able to move his family to Egypt where there was ample food (Genesis 45:37-47). After the death of Joseph, there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph. Under his rule, the Israelites increased mightily, and therefore, were cruelly treated. Despite their hardship, it was the best of times for the Hebrews. God was about to raise up a deliverer to stand against Pharaoh and lead the people to their home, The Promised Land, as spoken to Abraham in Genesis 15:13, 14 . . . *Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.* The deliverer's name, given to him by a princess, was Moses.

It has been said that behind every successful man is a woman of great influence. There were several women throughout Moses' life who had tremendous influence on him and on his character. In this study, we will learn about the choices that these women made and how those choices affected the Hebrew people and every generation that succeeded them, including yours and mine. God used ordinary women to accomplish His purposes: those who chose to place their trust in the Lord were led and used mightily by Him.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him (Exodus 15:2).

Names Given to the Women in this Story

A wife A daughter of Levi	<i>And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi</i> (Exodus 2:1). Moses' mother, Jochebed, was a daughter of Levi who married a man of the house of Levi which would become the priestly clan of Israel.
Jochebed His father's sister	<i>And Amram took him Jochebed his father's sister to wife; and she bare him Aaron and Moses . . .</i> (Exodus 6:20). The name <i>Jochebed</i> in Hebrew means - glory of Jehovah or Jehovah is her glory.
Pharaoh's Daughter	<i>And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river . . .</i> (Exodus 2:5). This is the only name the Bible records for this woman.
Shiphrah	<i>And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah . . .</i> (Exodus 1:15). The name <i>Shiphrah</i> in Hebrew means - beautiful one, splendid or royal pavilion.
Puah	<i>And the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives . . . and the name of the other Puah</i> (Exodus 1:15). The name <i>Puah</i> in Hebrew means - to glitter, brightness, or splendid one.
Zipporah	<i>. . . and he [Jethro] gave Moses Zipporah his daughter</i> (Exodus 2:21). The name <i>Zipporah</i> in Hebrew means - a little bird or sparrow. Zipporah was the daughter of Jethro, a priest of Midian.
Miriam Prophetess Sister of Aaron	<i>And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron . . .</i> (Exodus 15:20). The name <i>Miriam</i> in Hebrew means - bitterness and rebellion. She was a prophetess, one who declares the words of God. She was also the sister of Aaron and Moses.
Ethiopian Woman	<i>. . . he [Moses] had married an Ethiopian woman</i> (Numbers 12:1). Moses' second wife, a dark skinned beauty from Cush, south of the Nile.

SECTION I - The Bondage of the Israelites in Egypt

READ Exodus 1:1-22.

1. How many descendants of Jacob came to Egypt (vv. 1-5)? _____
Who was already in Egypt? _____
2. What happened to Joseph, all his brothers, and all that generation (v. 6)? _____
3. What does it say about the Israelites (v. 7)? _____

4. Who did the new King of Egypt not know (v. 8)? _____

5. Why did the king treat the Israelites wisely¹ (vv. 9, 10)? _____

6. How did the king seek to oppress the children of Israel (v. 11)? _____²

7. In spite of their affliction, how did God bless them (v. 12)? _____

What effect did this have on the Egyptians? _____

8. How did the Egyptians make the lives of the children of Israel unbearable (v. 13, 14)? _____

_____ ³

PERSONAL

It surely was difficult for the Israelites to trust God in these circumstances. While under harsh situations of life, have you ever been given a promise by God to strengthen you as you waited on the Lord to bring it to pass? How do these verses encourage you?

Psalm 25:3-5 _____

Psalm 27:14 _____

Psalm 62:5-8 _____

Psalm 130:5, 6 _____

Proverbs 3:5, 6 _____

¹ wisely: shrewdly, clever and cunning.

² afflict - Hebrew *anah* looking down: brow beating, abase, chasten, deal harshly with force, defile, hurt, ravish, weaken in any way.

³ rigour: strictness, severity, harshness; an act or instance of severity, oppression, or cruelty.

Isaiah 40:28-31 _____

The hardships put upon the children of Israel were minor, compared to what the king devised next. His diabolical plan was to stop the Israelites from multiplying through the murder of the innocent baby boys born to them. This was the epitome of evil. He even tried to use the Hebrew midwives to accomplish his goal, but God had a greater plan!

10. What were the midwives names (Exodus 1:15)? _____

11. What did Pharaoh command them to do (v. 16)? _____

12. Whom did the midwives fear (v. 17)? _____⁴

What did they do? _____

13. What was the midwives' answer to Pharaoh when he questioned them (v. 18, 19)? _____

14. How did God respond to Shiphrah, Puah, and to the Israelites (vv. 20, 21)? _____

15. As a result of the midwives action, what did the king command the people to do to all the baby boys (v. 22)?

PERSONAL

The midwives were in a difficult position, but chose to do right. By fearing God rather than man, God blessed them. Have you ever been in a position where you had to choose to obey God rather than man? What was the result?

⁴ feared God - Hebrew *yare* reverence: the fear of the LORD dreads God's displeasure, desires His favor, reveres His holiness, submits cheerfully to His will, is grateful for His benefits, sincerely worships Him, and conscientiously obeys His commands (Psalm 33:8, Proverbs 1:3, 7); to hate evil (Proverbs 8:13); the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7); to stand in awe of who God is. First mention of God in Exodus. God is presented as superior to the king whom Egyptians honored as God.

SECTION 2 - Jochebed, a Godly Mother

READ Exodus 2:1-10.

1. A marriage took place. What do you learn about Moses' parents (Exodus 2:1, 6:20)? What are their names?

2. *And the woman [Jochebed] conceived, and bare a son . . .* How is he described? What did his mother do (Exodus 2:2, Acts 7:20)?

3. What did Jochebed then do with the baby (Exodus 2:3)? _____

LOOK DEEPER

Jochebed laid her son in the reeds at the river's bank, trusting God would once again protect him. How do the following Scriptures describe the LORD?

Psalm 18:1-3 _____

Nahum 1:7 _____

4. Who watched from a distance (Exodus 2:4)? _____

Moses' sister, Miriam, according to most commentators, was about ten to twelve years of age at this time.

5. Briefly DESCRIBE what happened next (vv. 5, 6). _____

We know very little about Pharaoh's daughter; however, we do know God used her in Moses' life. She obviously knew about her father's decree. She also knew this child was a Hebrew, yet she had compassion⁶ on him. However, no one was aware of how God was working through this situation to free His people.

6. What did Miriam suggest to Pharaoh's daughter (v. 7)? _____

7. Who did the maiden call (v. 8)? _____

8. What agreement was made between the Pharaoh's daughter and the baby's mother (v. 9)? _____

LOOK DEEPER

Jochebed held on to the child for about three to five years, the weaning age. READ Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Proverbs 22:6 and WRITE what a parent is to teach his children.

9. What happened once the child grew (Exodus 2:10)? _____

What did Pharaoh's daughter call him? What does it mean? _____

10. What did Moses learn in Pharaoh's palace (Acts 7:21, 22)? _____

11. Why are Moses' parents honored in Hebrews 11:23? _____

⁵ Pharaoh - Hebrew the great house: the title of Egyptian kings.

⁶ compassion: deep sympathy for someone else's troubles.

LOOK DEEPER

READ the following Scriptures that declare God's protective Omnipresence⁷.

Joshua 1:9 _____

Psalm 139:7-10 _____

Isaiah 43:1, 2 _____

SECTION 3 - Zipporah, Moses' Midianite Wife

Moses was about the age of forty when he saw an Egyptian abusing a Hebrew. Moved to defend one of his own, he killed him. Pharaoh then sought to kill Moses, but he fled to the land of Midian⁸.

READ Exodus 2:11-22, 4:19-26.

1. Briefly DESCRIBE what happened to Moses in Exodus 2:11-15a. _____

2. To where did Moses flee (vv. 15b-17)? _____

What happened at the watering well? _____

⁷ omnipresence: present everywhere at all times.

⁸ Midian - Hebrew strife: region in the desert northwest of the Arabian Peninsula. Nomads from the fourth of the six sons of Abraham by his wife Keturah (see Genesis 25:2).

3. Jethro was concerned because his daughters came back so quickly. What reason did they give him (vv. 18, 19)?

4. How did Jethro bless Moses (vv. 20, 21)?

5. What were the names and meanings of Moses and Zipporah's sons (Exodus 2:22, 18:2-4)?

In Exodus 2:23-25, we read that the king of Egypt has died and the bondage of the people was great. . . . *their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.* God was already at work, He was preparing Moses to lead and free His suffering people.

LOOK DEEPER

READ Exodus Chapter 3. How did God reveal Himself to Moses and the children of Israel? What did He call Himself?

9

God called Moses to return to Egypt to deliver the children of Israel out of bondage. God gave him signs to authenticate him as God's chosen deliverer.

6. In Exodus 4:18, Moses went to Jethro and asked permission to go back to Egypt to see if his family was still alive. What was Jethro's response?

7. How did he take his family back to Egypt (Exodus 4:19, 20)?

What was in his hand? 10

⁹ I AM THAT I AM - Hebrew *YHWH*: *YAWEH* or *Jehovah* from the verb "to be"; meaning simply but profoundly He is. His full name is found only in Exodus 3:14 and means I AM WHO I AM.

¹⁰ the rod of God - Hebrew *matteh* a branch: Moses and Aaron's rod was a shepherd staff used to perform miracles; also symbolic of authority.

Forty years after fleeing from Egypt, Moses took his family back to Egypt in obedience to God's command. Circumcision was commanded by God in Genesis 17:9-14. Zipporah, being a Midianite may not have agreed with this commandment nor shared the spiritual values of her notable husband who acted against the sacred tradition of circumcision of Israel. Moses did not obey God's command of circumcision for his son and God was angry with him.

8. What did the Lord seek to do to Moses (Exodus 4:24)? _____

9. What was Zipporah's reaction (vv. 25, 26)? _____

What did Zipporah call Moses? _____¹¹

How did God respond? _____

It is believed that this is when Moses sent Zipporah and their sons back to her father's house in Midian (Exodus 18:2).

10. When and where did Moses see his wife Zipporah and their two sons again (Exodus 18:1-6)? _____

We don't hear any more about Zipporah. She disappears without comment from the history of the Jewish people in which her husband figures prominently, a history that faithfully records women of God. We know that her father was a godly influence to her, her sons, and a great help to Moses.

SECTION 4 - A Worshipful Miriam

In Exodus Chapters 5-14 is the marvelous story of God bringing His people out of Egypt. Exodus 14:30, 31 finishes with these words: *Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and His servant Moses.* Now Miriam, along with her brothers and the people, sang a song of victory to the Lord.

READ Exodus 15:1-21.

1. What does Scripture reveal about Miriam (vv. 20, 21)? _____¹²

¹¹ bloody husband: a name given because of God's command of circumcision.

¹² prophethess: a female prophet, a messenger inspired by God.

LOOK DEEPER

Moses knew the power of God to deliver His people. READ the song of Moses and DESCRIBE the greatness of God (Exodus 15:1-18).

SECTION 5 - A Critical Miriam

Miriam was now a very old woman, wandering in the wilderness with the children of Israel. God had continued to miraculously provide for His people by providing manna¹³ for them to eat daily. Yet instead of praise and thanksgiving, the people murmured and complained against God. In Numbers Chapter 12, the complaining was against Moses, God's chosen leader.

READ Numbers 12:1-15.

1. Who spoke against Moses (v. 1)? Why? _____

14

2. What was their complaint (v. 2)? _____

3. The Lord heard their complaint against Moses. How is Moses' character described (v. 3)? _____

¹³ manna - Hebrew *man-hu* what is this?: the name given by the Israelites to food miraculously supplied to them by God during their wandering in the wilderness (Exodus 16:15-35); bread from heaven.

¹⁴ Ethiopian woman - Hebrew *Cush* south of Egypt: region in Africa inhabited by the descendants of Ham, one of Noah's sons.

Aaron was the High Priest and Miriam was a prophetess of God. They both had high positions in the camp; however, the Lord teaches strongly never to speak against chosen servants of the Lord (Numbers 12:8).

4. What did God command them to do (Numbers 12:4, 5)? _____

How did He appear to them? _____

5. God defended Moses before Miriam and Aaron. What did God make clear was the difference between Moses and them (vv. 6-8)?

LOOK DEEPER

Why should you honor, respect, and respond to the godly leadership that God has placed over you?

Psalm 75:5-7 _____

Hebrews 13:17 _____

6. How did God respond toward Aaron and Miriam (Numbers 12:9)? _____

7. What happened to Miriam when God disappeared in the cloud (v. 10)? _____

8. What was Aaron's reaction (vv. 11, 12)? _____

9. Miriam must have instigated the rebellion against Moses; therefore the Lord's judgment fell on her, so Moses interceded for Miriam. How did the Lord respond to Moses' cry for mercy (vv. 13, 14)?

10. What consequences did the multitude suffer because of Miriam's sin (v. 15)? _____

We can learn from Miriam that sin in our lives will hold up God's plans for ourselves as well as others. Miriam sadly isn't mentioned any more in this journey until her death and burial in the wilderness of Zin¹⁶ in Numbers 20:1.

11. How did God honor Miriam in Micah 6:4? _____

MEMORY VERSE

_____ (Exodus 15:2).

The women in the life of Moses teach us about the importance of making godly choices. Each of these women made choices that affected the lives of their families and those around them. From Jochebed, Puah and Shiphrah, we learn that when you choose to fear God and put your trust in Him, He will bless you and use you to be a blessing to others. Pharaoh's daughter teaches us that God will use non-believers to get His will accomplished. Though Zipporah leaves us wondering about her relationship with God, she did save Moses from the wrath of God when he disobeyed Him. We can learn from Miriam no matter how greatly gifted and used of God we are, we still need to continue throughout our entire life to make godly choices; otherwise sin in our lives will hold back God's plan for ourselves, as well as others. We need to finish well.

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¹⁵ spit in her face: a practice abhorred by people in the ancient Near East. A seven day exile was normal for purification and restoration.

¹⁶ Wilderness of Zin: flat, lowland, along the extreme southern limits of the Promised Land, between the Dead Sea and Agabah.