

Ordinary Women of the BIBLE



A MOTHER'S SACRIFICE

JOCHEBED'S STORY

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CAROLE TOWRISS
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A MOTHER'S SACRIFICE JOCHEBED'S STORY

The following is an excerpt of the
historical information you'll find in
A Mother's Sacrifice.

Moses' birth mother, Jochebed, is mentioned by name only twice in Scripture. Exodus 6:20 tells us Jochebed married her nephew—Amram, her brother's son—and she bore two sons. Numbers 26:59 adds a daughter, Miriam, to their list of children.

The heart of Jochebed's story, however, is told in Exodus 2, where she sets her three-month-old son adrift on the Nile to save him from Pharaoh's murderous edict. In the same chapter, we meet Pharaoh's daughter, an Egyptian princess, also unnamed, who rescues the babe. The princess is then approached by the baby's sister who suggests her mother (Jochebed) as a wet nurse.

Mother. Pharaoh's Daughter. Sister. Three women who raised the man Yahweh later calls friend (Ex.33:11) and we know as Moses.

In addition to these factual insights, which provide the context for each story, you'll find footnotes throughout the text that reveal details about the life and time of each woman.

~ CHAPTER ONE ~



*“The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives,
whose names were Shiphrah and Puah,
‘When you are helping the Hebrew women during
childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby
is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.’”*

~ EXODUS 1:15-16 ~

The lavender hues of dawn glowed through the single window in Jochebed’s mud-brick house. The end of another restless night. Expecting her third child, she’d been as ill-tempered as a crocodile with her poor husband Amram. She rolled to her left side and faced him, stretching out her hand to caress his face.

He slept so peacefully, as he did every night after an arduous day’s work. She slipped her hand down his arm to his hand, coarse and calloused. How could hands so rough and hardened hold her so tenderly? She hadn’t told him, but this pregnancy had been different. The babe hadn’t moved as much, hadn’t been as active as the other two. She hadn’t grown as big. The midwives said it wasn’t serious enough to concern them, but Jochebed worried.

She winced, feeling a slight tightening low and across her abdomen. She rolled onto her back, thinking a change of position might help—then inhaled sharply and drew up her knees, when a hard contraction robbed dawn’s peace. She held her breath, waiting for it to pass, and released a slight groan as the births of her other two children came to mind.

Amram stirred, his eyes slow to open. “Did you say something, Beddie?”

The contraction ebbed, and a smile played on her lips. How she wished she could let him sleep longer, but her second birth—their son,

Aaron—was complete in less than a morning. “Amram, send Miriam to get the midwives.”

Her husband was on his feet before his eyes were open, his salt-and-pepper hair skewed in every direction. “Now? Are you all right? When did your pains begin?”

Jochebed lifted her hand, accepting help to stand. “Just send Miriam for the midwives, my love.” She pecked his cheek with a kiss. “Perhaps you and little Aaron can stay with me until Miriam returns with Puah and Shiphrah.”

“Of course. Yes.” He walked two steps to the curtained partition and poked his head inside, whispering to their daughter.

Moments later, their six-year-old appeared with a sleepy smile lighting her features. “I’ll be right back, Ima.” She patted Jochebed’s tummy on her way out of the curtained doorway to fetch Puah—the young, single midwife—who lived only three doors away.

Another contraction tore through Jochebed, sending her to one knee. She hoped Puah remembered to bring the birthing chair¹. The pains were already intense and coming quickly.

Amram knelt beside her and wrapped her shoulders with his strong arm. “Breathe, Beddie. That’s what the midwives say, isn’t it?”

She nodded, releasing the breath she’d been holding, and tried to inhale and exhale in rhythm with her beloved. He was trembling. This was as hard on him as it was on her. “I’ve had two easy births and healthy children, Amram. This one will be the same.” No need now to tell him of her worries.

He turned away, sniffed, and nodded his agreement. No words meant his emotions were too raw to speak.

El Shaddai, comfort my Amram. His first wife and unborn son had died thirty-eight years ago after a three-day labor. He’d vowed never to remarry; never to open his heart to that kind of pain again. But when

¹ Exodus 1:16 reveals woman in this era may have used a birth-chair. Genesis 30:3 says children were born “on the knees of” someone, which may mean childbirth took place on the knees of a midwife or other relative.

Jochebed spent her marriageable years caring for her ailing parents, her older brother showed his gratitude by arranging a marriage² with his eldest son—Amram. Amram had protested at first. He didn't wish to marry at all, let alone his aunt who was twenty-eight years younger.

The memory always made her chuckle, even when another contraction stole her breath. A strange chortle escaped, and Amram shot a concerned look her way. She smiled through gritted teeth. "Stop worrying. Must I call my brother to take a strap to you?" It was a good-natured threat she used often when needing to lighten the mood.

And it worked. Her husband swiped at tears and grinned. "My abba will take a strap to you if you keep holding your breath through these contractions."

His warm brown eyes infused her with strength, and she let him lead her to their woven-reed sleeping mat. "I'll sit behind you," he said, leaning against the wall. "You can lie back on my chest until the midwives bring their birthing contraptions."

She leaned back, enduring a few more pains, squeezing her husband's strong hands. He began reciting the sacred, ancient stories, which helped distract them both. Noah's great flood. Isaac's love for Rebekah. And Jochebed's favorite: when the Angel of the Lord wrestled with Father Jacob and renamed him Israel. Amram's rhythmic voice washed over her, soothing her even when the pains grew more frequent and intense.

Little Miriam rushed through their curtained doorway, tears streaming down rosy cheeks. "Puah is gone. Shiphrah too." Her shoulders shook, and she buried her face. "I tried to find them, but . . ."

"Shhh, little one." Jochebed called her over with open arms. "It's all right. Abba can find them—"

"No!" she shouted. "Shiphrah's husband said soldiers took them as the sun rose. Carried them to the villa in chariots."

² Ancient marriages were often arranged between a female and the oldest eligible male from within the same family—often cousins. (Genesis 27:46-28:2). This ensured the existence of the family and helped to preserve the culture and values.

Another contraction stole Jochebed's voice, but her mind whirred with dreadful possibilities.

Creeping dread began in her arms, prickly and spreading. First, up her arms. Then her legs. The birth pain subsided, but Jochebed's trembling increased. Barely maintaining composure, she spoke quietly to her daughter. "Go back to your mat, Miriam. Stay with your brother till he wakes."

"But I—"

"Go!" She didn't mean to shout. Her daughter looked as if she'd been slapped. "I'm sorry, love. Ima needs you to go to your room now." Another pain gripped her, and she bowed her head, biting her bottom lip to keep from crying out.

The sound of Miriam's retreating sandals released Jochebed's tears, and panic came in a whisper. "Amram, what if they do not return?" His arms, like an impenetrable shield, wrapped her in strength, and he pressed his lips against her ear. "You have given birth before. Remember how easy Aaron's birth was?"

Another contraction began. She squeezed her husband's hands, letting out a low groan. Her legs were shaking now, uncontrollably. Amram brushed hair from her forehead, wiping away sweat with it. Exhaling a long breath after the torturous contraction, Jochebed sat up and turned to face her husband. "This one is different. I haven't told you. I fear something is wrong."

Fear shone in Amram eyes. "Why would you keep this from me?" Another contraction rendered Jochebed silent, saving her husband from a tongue-lashing. A sudden gush of water soaked the reed mat beneath them, and Amram's look of horror said she dare not tease him about this.

He grabbed her shoulders, trembling again. "Are you all right? What's happening?"

Determined to remain calm in the face of his fear, she waited for the pain to ebb and framed his face with her hands. "You are going to deliver our child, my love. We'll do it together. All will be well." Time passed like a falcon in flight—seeming slow but with soaring progress. By the time Miriam cleared the dishes after fixing gruel for

the children's morning meal, Jochebed felt the overwhelming urge to push. "Get the children out," she said to Amram. "I don't want them to be frightened."

He could only nod, his eyes round as camels' hooves. "Children, I want you to take the water jar and fill it at the river. Then check again to see if the midwives have returned."

As the words were uttered, their doorway curtain stirred, and Shiphrah appeared—then Puah. Jochebed blinked to be sure she wasn't dreaming.

"Praise El Shaddai!" Amram nearly leapt to his feet, hurrying to relieve Puah of the birthing stool she carried. "You're just in time."

Both women's eyes were swollen and red-rimmed. They nudged Amram out of the way but avoided Jochebed's gaze. "Amram, you can take the children to my house," Shiphrah said. "We'll send word when—" Her voice broke, and she covered a sob.

Puah's face twisted into uncontrolled grief. She tried to turn away, but Jochebed grabbed her wrist, pulling her close. "Tell me what's wrong, Puah. Why did they carry you away to the palace?"

Puah nodded. "The king called to give us a new order."

Jochebed exchanged a horrified glance with Amram. "What kind of order?"

Shiphrah exhaled a deep sigh and stood, meeting Amram's concerned stare. "The King* is increasingly under the influence of his great uncle—"

"Shiphrah!" Puah glared at her mentor, fire and fear in her eyes. "Guard your tongue."

"What more can they do to us?" Her gaze took in Jochebed, then Amram, and then her young friend. "Ay is a wicked, evil man, and he has convinced the king there are far too many Hebrew male babies and children on the estate, that we are a dangerous people and will one

*Discover the surprising answer of who scholars now believe was the Pharaoh when Moses was born by sending for your free preview today!

day overthrow him. There is apparently an ancient prophecy to that effect, so he has ordered us . . .” Her lips trembled, her voice broke. She looked down at her hands. They were shaking.

Jochebed’s urge to push overtook her need to hear more, and she cried out. Puah and Shiphrah hurried to set up the birthing stool, arranging a clean blanket beneath it. “Take the children to your abba’s house, Amram.” Puah shooed him away, leaning down to hold Jochebed’s hand. “We’ll care for your wife.”

But he stood like a stone in the doorway. “I’m not leaving until you tell me what the king ordered you to do.”

Jochebed’s pain ebbed enough to plead with her friends. “What could Pharaoh possibly expect you to do to keep him safe from an ancient prophecy?”

The midwives exchanged an uneasy glance, and finally, Puah held Jochebed’s gaze. “The King ordered us to kill all male Hebrew babies the moment they are born.”

Horror strangled Jochebed, and the urge to push stole her reply. Her body demanded she give life to this child, and searing pain nearly split her in two. For months she’d protected this child within. How could she deliver it to hands that might harm?

Please, El Shaddai, let this baby be a girl.



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