

# Mother — The Revolutionary

*Exodus 2:1–10*

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## Introduction

Today is Mother's Day, and I was tempted to simply continue our study in 1 Samuel, where we have been watching a man named Saul be anointed as Israel's new king. But Mother's Day is too important to pass over — not merely because we want to remember and honor our mothers, though we do, but because motherhood is itself important. It is one of the primary means God uses to shape and impact human lives, and I believe it is designed in accordance with God's own nature.

Have you ever noticed the remarkable similarity between the work of God's Spirit and the work of a good mother? Next Sunday is Pentecost, and when you look at what Scripture tells us about the Holy Spirit, the parallels are striking. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin — and so do mothers. Scripture calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter — and mothers are comforters. The Holy Spirit teaches — and so do mothers. And the Holy Spirit is often overlooked, forgotten, and taken for granted — and so are mothers.

But here is the one that I want to linger on this morning: the Holy Spirit is a revolutionary. In the lives he embraces, people begin to live in quiet but real rebellion against the patterns of this world. We see it at Pentecost; we see it in the changed lives of believers; we see it in every season of genuine spiritual awakening. The Spirit brings about a revolt against the bondages of this world — and mothers do the same thing. A mother is that voice in your life that tells you not to simply go along with everyone else.

You know how the conversation goes. *Mom, Joey's parents let him stay up late.* And how does mom respond? *You are not Joey. Go to bed.* Joey, of course, stands in for the world — everyone else, the crowd, the current. And a good mother refuses to let the crowd set the standard for her children.

The woman we are going to study from Scripture this morning is one of the great mothers of the Bible, and if any of those descriptions fits her, it is this last one. In the raising of her three children, she was a revolutionary — and the revolution she launched set hundreds of thousands of slaves free.

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## The Problem: A Mother Born into Bondage

Her name was Jochebed, and many of you may never have heard of her before. But you will certainly have heard of her children. Let me tell you something of her story, and see if you can guess who they are.

Jochebed was born into slavery. Her parents were slaves, and their parents before them. The entire existence of these people consisted of making mud bricks out of straw — day after day, year after year. Can you imagine what it would feel like to know that your whole life amounted to that? Your parents did it. You do it. Your children will do it. And the man who ruled over them was so depraved that he felt he had the authority to decree that the newborn sons of these slave women did not even deserve to live.

What must it have been like to be a mother in that situation? To know that the future stretching out before your children was slavery — and that any son born to you carried a death sentence for the simple crime of being born? Every parent wants the best for their children. But what *best* did Jochebed have to offer? What could she give them except the same chains she wore?

By now you may have guessed the names of her children. Numbers 26:59 tells us plainly:

“The name of Amram’s wife was Jochebed, a descendant of Levi, who was born to the Levites in Egypt. To Amram she bore Aaron, Moses and their sister Miriam.”

Aaron, Moses, and Miriam — the three children of a slave woman who had nothing to give them except what she believed, and what she lived.

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## Miriam: The Rebellion of Praise

The first child Jochebed bore was a daughter, and she named her Miriam. In Hebrew, the name means *rebellion*. Think about that. Here is a woman in chains, and she names her firstborn child *Rebellion*. That is itself an act of defiance.

So what did Jochebed teach this daughter whose very name was a declaration of resistance? She taught her how to praise God. She taught her how to give thanks and glory to the Lord in the midst of suffering. In other words, she taught her the secret of joy — that no circumstance, however crushing, is greater than the One in whom we rejoice.

We see the fruit of this in Exodus 15. The Israelites have crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, Pharaoh’s armies in pursuit behind them. As the last of the Israelites reach the far bank, the

waters come crashing back together, and the army of Egypt is swallowed up. And in that moment, this is what happens:

“Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: ‘Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.’” (Exodus 15:20–21)

Miriam the prophetess is the first person recorded in Scripture to lead the people of God in song and dance. Where did she learn to do that? From her mother — in the darkness of slavery. The act of rebellion that Jochebed passed to the daughter she named Rebellion was the lifting of her voice in praise to God when every circumstance said there was nothing to sing about.

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## **Aaron: The Rebellion of Compassion**

The second child born to Jochebed was a son named Aaron. The name Aaron means *high and exalted* — a name that stands in direct and deliberate contrast to the status of a slave. To be a slave is to be low, to be counted as nothing. And so she names her son: *the exalted one*.

The act of rebellion that Jochebed cultivated in Aaron was compassion — a stubborn, countercultural commitment to support, encourage, and bear the burdens of other people. We see this throughout Aaron’s life. He is always alongside his brother Moses, lifting him up, speaking for him, standing with him. And when God chose a high priest for Israel, he did not choose Moses, the strategist and lawgiver. He chose Aaron.

Not because Aaron was the most holy — he had his share of failures, the golden calf being the most notorious. Not because he was the most brilliant — Moses was the sharper mind. God chose Aaron because the defining quality of the high priest was compassion: the willingness to carry the weight of the people before the Lord. Aaron’s rebellion against the world he lived in was simply this — he refused to stop caring about other people.

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## **Moses: The Rebellion of Identity**

Finally, there is the youngest, Moses. His name was not given to him by Jochebed but by Pharaoh’s daughter, who rescued him and claimed him as her own. The name Moses means *drawn out* — because, she said, she drew him out of the water. The irony is almost too rich: the one drawn out of the Nile would become the one who drew an entire people out of Egypt.

The circumstances of Moses' birth were desperate. Pharaoh had issued a decree that every Hebrew baby boy was to be thrown into the Nile and drowned:

“Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, ‘Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.’” (Exodus 1:22)

When Moses was born, Jochebed hid him as long as she could. When that was no longer possible, she did something almost unimaginable for any mother: she placed her infant son in a waterproofed basket and set him adrift on the Nile. Her actions speak both to the desperation of the moment and to a radical, unshaken trust in God. She would not give up. She would not give in.

And the plan, it seems, was not without thought. Miriam was sent to follow the basket at a distance. The passage reads as though Pharaoh's daughter was not an accidental discovery but perhaps a calculated hope:

“Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, ‘This is one of the Hebrews’ children.’ Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, ‘Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?’ And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Go.’ So the girl went and called the child’s mother. And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.’ So the woman took the child and nursed him.” (Exodus 2:5–9)

Not only did Jochebed save her son's life through this act of radical trust — she was paid wages to raise him. What a stunning reversal.

We do not know precisely how long Jochebed nursed Moses before she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter. In traditional societies of the ancient Near East, nursing could extend to five or even seven years. Those early years — the most formative years, the years in which identity is shaped — were spent with Jochebed. In the time she had with him, she gave Moses the one thing no palace could give him and no decree could take away: she told him who he was. *You are a Hebrew. These are your people.*

The proof of it comes years later, after Moses has grown up in Pharaoh's household, educated in Egyptian schools, steeped in Egyptian culture:

“One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people.” (Exodus 2:11, NIV)

Who did Moses see as *his* people? The Hebrews. Despite his Egyptian name, his Egyptian upbringing, his place in Pharaoh's own household — he knew where he belonged. And where did that knowledge come from? From a slave woman who spent the first years of his life whispering the truth of his identity into his heart.

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## **The Revolution, Then and Now**

Jochebed was a revolutionary, and her weapons were the lessons she pressed into her three children:

She taught Miriam to praise God — to give him thanks and glory in the very midst of suffering, because the joy of the Lord is a strength that this world cannot extinguish.

She taught Aaron compassion — to lift up and carry the people around him, to refuse the self-protective indifference that oppression breeds.

She gave Moses an identity — a knowledge of whose he was that ran deeper than any empire's claim on him.

Those are not small things. Those three acts of motherhood brought down the mightiest empire on earth.

We are not slaves in the way Jochebed was. But that does not mean we face no bondage. We who believe in Jesus Christ are, like Jochebed, called to live in rebellion against this world. We are in rebellion against a culture that measures human worth by physical attractiveness or the size of a bank account. We are in rebellion against the gospel of selfishness this world preaches — get everything you can, look out only for yourself. We are in rebellion against injustice, against oppression, against the sin that entangles our own lives. Scripture puts it plainly:

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2, NIV)

That is a call to revolution.

When we pray for spiritual revival — for the Holy Spirit to move in this country, to change the hearts and minds of people — we are praying for exactly that: a revolution led by God's Spirit. And if we pray that way, we are called to live in accordance with our prayers. That means practicing the same acts of rebellion that Jochebed passed on to her children.

It means praising God in the midst of suffering, because there is nothing in this world that can take the joy of the Lord from us. It means being people of compassion — the New Testament calls Christians a nation of priests, and the priesthood exists not for its own privilege but to

carry the weight of others before God. And it means holding fast to an identity that no culture and no empire can define or revoke. We are the people of God, a nation created in Christ, saved by his work, redeemed by his blood. As Paul writes:

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” (Galatians 3:28–29)*

That identity is revolutionary — and I believe it is the primary reason that Christians are persecuted in every generation. In fifty-three countries today, wearing a shirt with a cross on it is a punishable offense. The empire always knows when it has been defied.

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## **The Invitation**

So here is the question this Mother’s Day: are you part of the revolution?

To be in rebellion against this world is simply to refuse its authority — its authority to tell you what you are worth, to define right and wrong, to determine your purpose and your meaning. It is to submit yourself instead to the authority of Christ. There is no middle ground here. You cannot serve two masters. You are either in rebellion against this world or you are in rebellion against Christ. Jochebed chose. Her children chose. The question, on this Mother’s Day, is whether we will choose as well.