

MOTHERHOOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

John Hilton III and Lani Hilton

Jaroldeen Edwards, a mother of twelve children, had just published a novel and was being interviewed in her home by two female reporters. Although she tried to maintain a professional appearance, her children embarrassed her by continually seeking her attention. As the reporters were leaving, one went to use the telephone, leaving Jaroldeen alone with the senior reporter. Jaroldeen recounts:

“There’s something I want to tell you,” [the reporter] said intensely. . . . “I just want you to know that we were sold a lie.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, totally puzzled.

“I mean, when I went to college they lied to us. . . . We were told not to throw our lives away on husbands and children, but to go out into the world and to succeed. We were told that only through a professional career could we ‘find ourselves’ or live a worthwhile life.

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“I just want you to know that this morning I have realized it was all a lie. . . . *I would trade all my so-called worldly success for one day of living your life.*”¹

Countless people today believe what the reporter was taught, that motherhood is a burden and that there are better areas for women to pursue. But many mothers in the Old Testament would disagree. These women offer several lessons for modern-day matriarchs. In contrast to some current philosophies, the Old Testament teaches the importance of motherhood by establishing the significance of posterity and the influence and blessings that come from raising children. It provides several accounts of sacrifices mothers made and shows how those sacrifices changed history. The Old Testament also teaches of the powerful influence mothers have— not only on their children but on entire nations and future generations.

AN OVERVIEW OF MOTHERHOOD IN OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

The word *mother* or one of its derivatives occurs 232 times in the Old Testament—50 percent more than all of the other standard works combined (see the table below).² This figure indicates that the Old Testament teaches significant lessons regarding motherhood.

TIMES A FORM OF THE WORD “MOTHER” IS USED

Old Testament	232
New Testament	96
Book of Mormon	41
Doctrine and Covenants	6
Pearl of Great Price	9
Total	384

Just as modern mothers have a variety of roles and time-consuming responsibilities, so too did ancient mothers. These tasks included “keeping the home in order, caring for small children . . . , tending gardens and small animals, producing textiles, and taking responsibility for food preparation and preservation.”³ These duties were often lengthy and complicated. For example, in order to provide clothes for the family, sheep or other animals had to be sheared. “After shearing, the wool or hair was

beaten to free it from embedded dirt or leaves. Then the mother of the family, assisted by her daughters, combed the wool, spun it into thread, wove it on the family loom, and sometimes dyed the cloth in a vat.³⁴

Even making bread was a time-consuming process. The cereal crops used by the Israelites would “require a complex series of operations to make them edible. The grains must be processed by soaking, milling, grinding; the flour is then mixed into a dough, set to rise, and baked in order to produce bread. Grain processing alone could easily consume two hours or more per day of a woman’s time, not including the procurement of fuel and tending of the oven fires that were the prelude to baking.”³⁵

In addition to managing the home, mothers in the Old Testament were highly involved in the lives of their posterity. They had a large role in the training and instruction of their children (see Deuteronomy 21:18; Proverbs 1:8; 6:20) and significantly influenced their future (see Genesis 27:1–17). We note that “of the forty-six recorded instances of naming children in the Old Testament, in twenty-eight the name is given by the mother. It is generally accepted that name giving in the Old Testament represented an expression of authority.”³⁶

Motherhood was perhaps the deepest desire of women in the Old Testament. One scholar wrote, “For ancient Israelites the most important contribution a woman could make to a household was to present her husband with children. . . . Indeed, the noblest contribution a woman could make to a household in general and her husband in particular was to bear a son for him. Through childbearing, a woman earned her place in life and her share in the household. Conversely, failure to deliver on this obligation was viewed as a curse and a shameful disgrace.”³⁷

Although one might think that women during Old Testament times were less than or subservient to men, their roles were equally important. Many of these mothers were powerful teachers, significantly affecting the nurturing and teaching of their children and generations after them.³⁸ Beginning with Eve, Old Testament matriarchs offer several lessons for modern-day mothers.

MOTHERHOOD IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

A continual pattern throughout the creation concerns the importance of posterity. The first recorded statement that God made after

creating male and female was “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28).⁹

The word *Eve* itself is “from the Hebrew root *hyh*, ‘to live,’” and means “living, life giver.”¹⁰ When Adam called his wife Eve, it emphasized her role in bearing children. “And Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20). After Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit, the Lord spoke to Eve regarding her responsibility for motherhood, saying, “*Thou shalt* bring forth children” (Genesis 3:16; emphasis added). Having children was both a blessing and a commandment—and Adam and Eve fulfilled it. We read, “Adam knew his wife, and she bare unto him sons and daughters, and they began to multiply and to replenish the earth” (Moses 5:2). Having children was a source of joy. Eve “was ‘glad’ after the Fall, realizing she otherwise ‘never should have had seed’ (Moses 5:11).”¹¹

Although not all women are able to have children, Sheri L. Dew pointed out that mothering is an inherent part of womanhood. She said, “Both God the Father and Adam called Eve ‘the mother of all living’—and they did so *before* she ever bore a child (Moses 4:26). . . . Motherhood . . . is the essence of who we are as women.”¹² From Eve we learn that from the beginning man and woman were to be married and have children. Motherhood is a vital part of womanhood; it is a role that can bring great joy.

POSTERITY AND THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Having children was also a key part of the Abrahamic covenant. The patriarch Abraham, as well as his descendants, received promises from the Lord that can help us understand Old Testament teachings on the significance and blessings of posterity. The Lord promised Abraham that his wife Sarah would “be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her” (Genesis 17:16). Later, the Lord promised, “I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore” (Genesis 22:17).

This same covenant was established with Isaac and, in turn, with Jacob (see Genesis 17:21; 28:1–4). To Jacob the Lord promised, “Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 28:14).

Although these promises were given to the patriarchs, the blessings clearly involved both husband and wife. It appears that having an extensive posterity was one of the most sublime blessings that could be offered.

THREE GREAT MATRIARCHS

Although posterity was a key blessing promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, receiving this blessing was a great challenge for them—and their wives, Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel.¹³ A study of their lives shows how important motherhood was to these noble women.

Sarah is first mentioned in Genesis 11:29. The next verse describes her in relation to motherhood, stating, “But Sarai was barren; she had no child” (Genesis 11:30). Having posterity was so important to her that she gave her maid to Abraham so that he could have seed (see Genesis 16:1–3). This emphasis on Sarah’s infertility demonstrates the importance that was placed on motherhood.

The story of Sarah as recorded in the Old Testament is essentially the story of motherhood. When she was ninety and Abraham one hundred years old, “God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, . . . I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her” (Genesis 17:15–16).

Sarah was incredulous that she could bear a child in her old age; nevertheless, “the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him” (Genesis 21:1–2).

Sarah rejoiced in her motherhood and said, “God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me” (Genesis 21:6). It certainly was not easy to bear a child in her nineties; however, Sarah focused on the joy that came from motherhood, not the hardships.¹⁴

Sarah’s son Isaac would eventually marry Rebekah. Abraham’s needing to sacrifice Isaac is often discussed, but what of the sacrifice that Rebekah and *her* mother made? Rebekah’s mother courageously let her daughter make her own choice regarding her marriage to Isaac, and Rebekah boldly declared, “I will go” (Genesis 24:58), and departed to begin a new life. As she left, her family’s desires for her centered on

her potential for motherhood. They expressed their wishes by saying to her, “Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions” (Genesis 24:60). This farewell, focused on posterity, further helps us understand the high regard in which motherhood was held.

Yet motherhood was not immediately in Rebekah’s future. For twenty years she waited for children, but none came. This was a matter of prayer for their family, and ultimately “Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived” (Genesis 25:21).

Rebekah loved her children. She grieved when they did wrong (see Genesis 26:35) and surely rejoiced when they did well (see Proverbs 23:25). Her son Jacob later traveled to the area where Rebekah had grown up. There he met Rachel and fell in love with her. Through the maneuverings of Laban, her father, Jacob married both Rachel and her older sister Leah. Leah was able to bear children, but Rachel could not. In fact, “when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die” (Genesis 30:1).

Although Rachel’s prayers were not immediately answered, eventually “God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach” (Genesis 30:22–23).¹⁵

Having children *did* take away Rachel’s reproach. Her son Joseph became the second in command to Pharaoh and saved his family members from starvation. Rachel also had another son; she made the ultimate sacrifice to become Benjamin’s mother. The scriptures state that Rachel was “in hard labour” (Genesis 35:17) and died in the process of giving birth. Her sacrifice stands as a sacred testament to the price of motherhood.

Many people throughout the world today are descendants of these three women—Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel—each of whom was deeply committed to motherhood. The faith of these great matriarchs is evident in their desire to honor God, be true to their covenants, and raise righteous posterity. Although each struggled to bear children, their consecrated service as mothers has blessed “thousands of millions” (Genesis 24:60).

GOD'S ROLE IN MOTHERHOOD

An interesting facet of motherhood in the Old Testament is its focus on God's role in sending children to earth. Consider the following examples:

"For *the Lord* had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech" (Genesis 20:18; emphasis added).

"And when *the Lord* saw that Leah was hated, *he* opened her womb" (Genesis 29:31; emphasis added).

"*The Lord* gave her conception" (Ruth 4:13; emphasis added).

"But *the Lord* had shut up her [Hannah's] womb" (1 Samuel 1:5; emphasis added).

Each of these statements illustrates that God was involved in the timing of childbirth, and people in the Old Testament recognized this. When "the Lord . . . had closed the wombs of the house of Abimelech, Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children" (Genesis 20:18, 17).

Similarly, "Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived" (Genesis 25:21).

At one point it appears that Jacob felt Rachel was blaming him for their lack of children. When she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die," Jacob responded, "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" (Genesis 30:1-2).

These examples contrast with what is often taught in today's world. Many in modern society do not acknowledge God's role in the timing of birth and choose not to include him in their decisions about childbearing.¹⁶

LESSONS FOR OUR DAY

Eighty-four mothers are mentioned by name in the Old Testament (see the appendix for a complete list). Valuable lessons can be learned from these women, as well as the unnamed Old Testament mothers. Consider the following examples:

Hannah. One of the most prominent mothers in the Old Testament is Hannah, the mother of Samuel. Elkanah, her husband, loved her, "but the Lord had shut up her womb" (1 Samuel 1:5). Her inability to have children was a deep source of pain; she fretted and "wept, and did not

eat” (I Samuel 1:7). Elkanah did not fault Hannah; rather, he attempted to comfort her, saying, “Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?” (I Samuel 1:8).

The fact that Hannah continued to worry about this matter leads one to believe that Elkanah was *not* better to her than ten sons. Hannah went to the Tabernacle and covenanted with the Lord that if he would give her a child she would dedicate his life to the Lord. After she “poured out [her] soul before the Lord” and returned from the Tabernacle, “the Lord remembered her” (I Samuel 1:15, 19).

Shortly thereafter, she bore a son, Samuel, and rejoiced, saying, “*For this child I prayed*; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him” (I Samuel 1:27; emphasis added). As she had promised, Hannah delivered him to the Lord by having him serve in the Tabernacle with Eli. But her dedication to nurturing Samuel did not end. She “made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice” (I Samuel 2:19).

In addition, “the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters” (I Samuel 2:21). Although Hannah is not heard of again in the scriptural account, one can assume that she experienced joy in her posterity. Hannah provides an example of a woman with a “mother heart”¹⁷ who deeply desired children and sacrificed to raise them up to the Lord. Hannah teaches us to pray for posterity and to cherish those children if the Lord sends them. She was blessed “to be a joyful mother of children” (Psalm 113:9).

Jochebed. Jochebed is another who stands out as a faithful mother in the Old Testament, particularly considering the historical context of her motherhood. The Pharaoh had decreed that all male children were to be killed. Yet when Jochebed gave birth to Moses, she was “not afraid of the king’s commandment” (Hebrews 11:23). Seeing that her son “was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river’s brink” (Exodus 2:2–3).

Jochebed had her daughter Miriam follow Moses, who was discovered by the Pharaoh’s daughter. Miriam then arranged for Moses to return

to his mother to be nursed. It is not clear how long Moses stayed with Jochebed; three years may be a good estimate.¹⁸ Nothing is mentioned of what Jochebed taught Moses during that brief period, but it must have been powerful—because although Moses became steeped in the “wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22), he “forsook Egypt” (Hebrews 11:27). Teachings from his mother in his earliest years likely had a significant influence on his decision to turn his back on the riches and power that could have been his.¹⁹ Jochebed teaches mothers to be courageous in protecting their children. The words of mothers are remembered (see Alma 56:47–48).

The mothers of kings. The phrase “his mother’s name was” appears twenty-one times in the books of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles. While recounting the names and deeds of the various kings, the authors of these books consistently recorded the names of the kings’ mothers. One commentator asked, “Was the Chronicler, as he analyzed so well the character of the mothers of the kings of Judah, trying to stress that a nation’s rise or fall may be determined by its mothers? Does the Chronicler seem to say to us that if you would sway the world in the direction of good, you must begin with its mothers?”²⁰

Detailed information is not available about all of these mothers. Although some kings ignored their mothers (see 1 Kings 15:11–13), many followed their precepts. For example, of King Ahaziah we read, “His mother was his counsellor to do wickedly” (2 Chronicles 22:3). One can only imagine how history would have been different if Ahaziah’s mother had been his counselor to do good.

From the mothers of the kings, we learn that mothers influence not just children but nations. In this vein, Elder Neal A. Maxwell asked, “When the real history of mankind is fully disclosed, will it feature the echoes of gunfire or the shaping sound of lullabies? The great armistices made by military men or the peacemaking of women in homes and in neighborhoods? Will what happened in cradles and kitchens prove to be more controlling than what happened in congresses?”²¹

Rizpah. Although the name Rizpah is scarcely known, important lessons can be learned from this “mother in Israel” (Judges 5:7). She was one of Saul’s concubines and had two sons, Armoni and Mephibosheth (see 2 Samuel 3:7, 21:8). As part of making peace with the Gibeonites,

David delivered seven of Saul's descendants, including Rizpah's sons, to the Gibeonites, who "hanged them" (2 Samuel 21:9). After her sons were slain, "Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night" (2 Samuel 21:10).

It is unusual that Rizpah's sons were not immediately buried. Deuteronomy 21:23 states that those who are hung "shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day." Perhaps this makes Rizpah's vigil even more significant because she was still willing to protect the bodies of her deceased sons. The text states that Rizpah worked *by day* and *by night*; her tireless efforts likely continued for six months.²² Elder Charles H. Hart praised Rizpah: "We have a beautiful picture in Holy Writ of the *mother love* of Rizpah. . . . It is an illustration of the *mother love* that she . . . kept this lonely and faithful vigil."²³ Similarly, mothers today must guard their children by day and by night. There are yet "birds of the air" and "beasts of the field" who would seek to do them harm. Like Rizpah, modern-day mothers in Israel demonstrate their *mother love* as they do all in their power to protect their children.

The Shunammite woman. Another lesser-known mother in the Old Testament is the Shunammite woman. She showed great care for the prophet Elisha, yet when he offered to reward her, she asked for nothing. Elisha and his servant Gehazi determined that her reward should be to have a child, even though her husband was old (see 2 Kings 4:14). Then "the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her" (2 Kings 4:17). She treasured this child, and when he suffered a serious ailment, she exercised great faith in seeking Elisha to heal her son. She would not trust anyone but the prophet to heal him.

Her story is brief and may appear unworthy of attention. Nevertheless, lessons can be learned from the Shunammite woman. Her name is never mentioned in the scriptures—but this does not detract from her value. Many mothers labor in relative anonymity, yet as the Shunammite woman did, they save the lives of their children. Their work matters. In addition, as the Shunammite woman focused on Elisha, modern mothers bless and heal their children as they focus their attention on the counsel of the living prophet.

CONCLUSION

These examples of lessons from Old Testament mothers are only a few among many. Mothers from Abigail to Zipporah have additional lessons to teach. Beginning with “the mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20), mothers held a supremely important role in the Old Testament, and this role continues to the present day. It is interesting to note that the only scripture quoted in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” comes from the Old Testament and concerns the importance of posterity (see Psalm 127:3).

Indeed, modern prophets have consistently affirmed the importance of motherhood. President Spencer W. Kimball taught, “No matter what you read or hear, no matter what the differences of circumstances you observe in the lives of women about you, it is important for you Latter-day Saint women to understand that the Lord holds motherhood and mothers sacred and in the highest esteem. He has entrusted to his daughters the great responsibility of bearing and nurturing children.”²⁴

In a tribute to mothers, Elder Russell M. Nelson quoted the First Presidency as saying, “Motherhood . . . is near to divinity. It is the highest, holiest service to be assumed by mankind. It places her who honors its holy calling and service next to the angels.”²⁵

Although “for some time it has not been vogue for women to extol the virtues of motherhood or for young women to express the desires of their hearts to be mothers,”²⁶ Old Testament matriarchs reach across the centuries to affirm the value of motherhood. Their sacrifices altered the course of human history. As we read of mothers in the Old Testament and throughout the scriptures, we should contemplate the sacrifices they made. Their lives testify to us of the importance of posterity and the vital role mothers play in shaping the future of the world.

 APPENDIX: ALL MOTHERS NAMED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT²⁷

*Abigail*¹. Mother of Chileab (2 Samuel 2:2–3).

*Abigail*². Mother of Amasa (2 Samuel 17:25).

*Abihail*¹. Mother of Ahban and Molid (1 Chronicles 2:29).

*Abihail*². Mother of Mahalath (2 Chronicles 11:18).

*Abijah*¹. Mother of Ashur (1 Chronicles 2:24).

- Abijah*². Mother of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29:1).
- Abital*. Mother of Shephatiah (1 Chronicles 3:3).
- Adah*¹. Mother of Jabal and Jubal (Genesis 4:19–23).
- Adah*². Mother of Eliphaz (Genesis 36:2–4).
- Ahinoam*¹. Mother of Jonathan, Ishui, Melchi-shua, Merab, and Michal (1 Samuel 14:49–50).
- Ahinoam*². Mother of Amnon (2 Samuel 3:2).
- Aholibamah*. Mother of Jeush, Jaalam, and Korah (Genesis 36:5).
- Ahlahi*. Mother of Zabad (1 Chronicles 11:41).
- Anah*. Mother of Aholibamah (Genesis 36:2).
- Asenath*. Mother of Manasseh and Ephraim (Genesis 41:50–52).
- Atarah*. Mother of Onam (1 Chronicles 2:26).
- Athaliah*. Mother of Ahaziah (2 Kings 8:26).
- Azubah*¹. Mother of King Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:42).
- Azubah*². Mother of Jesher, Shobab, and Ardon (1 Chronicles 2:18–19).²⁸
- Basemath*. Mother of Reuel (Genesis 36:4).
- Bathsheba*. Mother of an unnamed child and Solomon (1 Samuel 12:15–24).²⁹
- Billah*. Mother of Dan and Naphtali (Genesis 30:4–8).
- Bithiah*. Mother of Miriam, Shammai, and Ishbah (1 Chronicles 4:17–18).
- Eglah*. Mother of Ithream (2 Samuel 3:5).
- Elisheba*. Mother of Nadab, Abishu, Eleazar, and Ithamar (Exodus 6:23).
- Ephah*. Mother of Haran, Moza, and Gazez (1 Chronicles 2:46).
- Ephratah (Ephrath)*. Mother of Hur (1 Chronicles 2:19, 50).
- Eve*. Mother of Cain, Abel, Seth, and other sons and daughters (Moses 5:2, 16–17; 6:2).
- Gomer*. Mother of Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi (Hosea 1:4–6).
- Hagar*. Mother of Ishmael (Genesis 16:15).
- Haggith*. Mother of Adonijah (2 Samuel 3:4).
- Hammoleketh*. Mother of Ishod, Abiezer, and Mahalah (1 Chronicles 7:18).
- Hamutal*. Mother of Jehoahaz and Zedekiah (2 Kings 23:31; 24:18).
- Hannah*. Mother of Samuel, as well as three more sons and two daughters (1 Samuel 1:20; 2:21).
- Helah*. Mother of Zereth, Jezoar, and Ethnan (1 Chronicles 4:7).

- Hephzibah*. Mother of Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1).
- Hodesh*. Mother of Jobab, Zibia, Mesha, Malcham, Jeuz, Shachia, and Mirma (1 Chronicles 8:8–10).
- Hushim*. Mother of Abitub and Elpaal (1 Chronicles 8:11).
- Jecoliah*. Mother of Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:3).
- Jedidah*. Mother of Josiah (2 Kings 22:1–2).
- Jehoaddan*. Mother of Amaziah (2 Kings 14:2).
- Jehudijah (Hodiah)*. Mother of Jered, Heber, and Jeduthiel (1 Chronicles 4:18–19).
- Jerioth*. Mother of Jeshar, Shobab, and Ardon (1 Chronicles 2:18).³⁰
- Jerusha*. Mother of Jotham (2 Kings 15:33).
- Jezebel*. Mother of Ahaziah, Jehoram (Joram), and Athaliah (1 Kings 16:31; 22:53; 2 Kings 3:2, 13; 9:22).³¹
- Jochebed*. Mother of Miriam, Aaron, and Moses (Numbers 26:59).
- Keturah*. Mother of Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah (Genesis 25:2).
- Leah*. Mother of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulon, and Dinah (Genesis 29:32–35; 30:21).
- Maachah¹*. Mother of Absalom (2 Samuel 3:3).
- Maachah² (Michaiah)*. Mother of Abijam (1 Kings 15:2).
- Maachah³*. Mother of Peresh and Sheresh (1 Chronicles 7:15–16).
- Maachah⁴*. Mother of Sheber, Tirhanah, Shaaph, Sheva, and probably Achsah (1 Chronicles 2:48–49).
- Maachah⁵*. Mother of Gibeon, Abdon, Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, Gedor, Ahio, Zechariah, and Mikloth (1 Chronicles 9:35–37).
- Mahalath*. Mother of Jehush, Shemariah, and Zaham (2 Chronicles 11:18–19).
- Matred*. Mother of Mehetabel (Genesis 36:39; 1 Chronicles 1:50).
- Merab*. Mother of five sons (1 Samuel 18:9; 2 Samuel 21:8).
- Meshullemeth*. Mother of Amon (2 Kings 21:19).
- Milcah*. Mother of Huz, Buz, Kemuel, Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel (Genesis 11:29; 22:20).
- Naamah*. Mother of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:21, 31; 2 Chronicles 12:13).
- Naarah*. Mother of Ahuzam, Hepher, Temeni, and Haahashtari (1 Chronicles 4:6).
- Naomi*. Mother of Mahlon and Chilion (Ruth 1:2, 20–21; 2:1).

- Nehushta*. Mother of Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:8).
- Penimah*. Mother of an unspecified number of sons and daughters (1 Samuel 1:2, 4).
- Puah*. Mother of an unspecified number of children (Exodus 1:15–21).
- Rachel*. Mother of Joseph and Benjamin (Genesis 30:22–24; 35:18).
- Rahab*. Mother of Boaz (Joshua 2:1, 3; 6:17–25; Matthew 1:5).
- Rebekah*. Mother of Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25:24–26).
- Reumah*. Mother of Tebah, Gaham, Thahash, and Maachah (Genesis 22:24).
- Rizpah*. Mother of Armoni and Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 21:8).
- Ruth*. Mother of Obed (Ruth 4:17).
- Sarai (Sarah)*. Mother of Isaac (Genesis 21:3).
- Shelomith*. Mother of an unnamed son (Leviticus 24:11).
- Shimeath*. Mother of Zabad (2 Chronicles 24:26).
- Shimriith*. Mother of Jehozabad (2 Chronicles 24:26).
- Shiphrah*. Mother of an unspecified number of children (Exodus 1:15–21).
- Tamar*. Mother of Pharez and Zerah (1 Chronicles 2:4).
- Timna*. Mother of Amalek (Genesis 36:12).
- Zebudah*. Mother of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:36).
- Zeruah*. Mother of Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:26).
- Zeruiah*. Mother of Abishai, Joab, and Asahel (1 Chronicles 2:16).
- Zibiah*. Mother of Joash (2 Kings 12:1; 2 Chronicles 24:1).
- Zillah*. Mother of Tubal-cain and likely Naamah (Genesis 4:19, 22).
- Zilpah*. Mother of Gad and Asher (Genesis 30:9–13).
- Zipporah*. Mother of Gershom and Eliezer (Exodus 18:2–4).

NOTES

1. Jaroldeen Edwards, “Following Christ in Service to Others,” *Church News*, March 10, 1990, 8; emphasis added.

2. On average, the Old Testament has one reference to mothers every 5.1 pages; the New Testament, one reference every 4.2 pages; the Book of Mormon, one reference every 13 pages; the Doctrine and Covenants, one reference every 49 pages; the Pearl of Great Price, one reference every 6.8 pages.

3. Carol Meyers, “The Family in Ancient Israel,” in *Families in Ancient Israel*, ed. Leo Perdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John Collins, and Carol Meyers (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 25. In addition, see Proverbs 31:13–27 for another list of female responsibilities.

4. Edith Deen, *Family Living in the Bible* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 177.
5. Meyers, "The Family in Ancient Israel," 25.
6. Daniel L. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 67 n. 153.
7. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," 72.
8. It is also interesting to note that, although not directly specified in the Old Testament, for millennia, Jewish tradition has held that whether a child is an ethnic Jew depends on the lineage of the mother, not the father.
9. This same commandment was given to Noah after the Flood (see Genesis 9:1, 7) as well as to Jacob (see Genesis 35:11). Modern prophets have further instructed that it remains in force today ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102).
10. Carol Meyers, "Eve," in *Women in Scripture*, ed. Carol Meyers (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 79.
11. Sheri L. Dew, "Are We Not All Mothers?" *Ensign*, November 2001, 97.
12. Dew, "Are We Not All Mothers?" 96.
13. Of course, Abraham and Jacob each had another wife and bore children through other women.
14. Although in Genesis 21:6 Sarah states, "God hath made me to laugh," footnote *a* states that the Hebrew root *tzachak* "means both 'to laugh' and 'to rejoice'; thus there is double meaning implied in its use here." This incident appears to be the foundation for Isaac's name, which means "he laugheth" (Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001], 850).
15. It is interesting to note that in the scriptures many things happen in threes. These three matriarchs giving birth miraculously is another example of this phenomenon.
16. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, "The Lord has told us to multiply and replenish the earth that we might have joy in our posterity, and there is no greater joy than the joy that comes of happy children in good families. But he did not designate the number, nor has the Church. That is a sacred matter left to the couple and the Lord" (*Cornerstones of a Happy Home*, pamphlet [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1984], 6; emphasis added).
17. Julie B. Beck, "A 'Mother Heart,'" *Ensign*, May 2004, 75.
18. Children were "nursed for a customary period of three years," so it may be that this is the amount of time Moses spent with Jochebed (Leo G. Perdue, "The Israelite and Early Jewish Family: Summary and Conclusions," in *Families in Ancient Israel*, 171).
19. President Ezra Taft Benson taught, "Mothers, you are your children's best teacher. . . . Teach your children the gospel in your own home, at your own fireside. This is the most effective teaching that your children will ever receive. This is the Lord's way of teaching. The Church cannot teach like you can. The school cannot. The day-care center cannot. But you can, and the Lord will sustain you. Your children will remember your teachings forever, and when they are old, they will not depart from them. They will call you blessed—their truly angel mother" ("To the Mothers

in Zion,” fireside address, February 22, 1987, reprinted in *Eternal Marriage Student Manual* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001], 356).

20. Deen, *Family Living in the Bible*, 80.

21. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Women of God,” *Ensign*, May 1978, 10–11.

22. The vigil was kept “until rain fell and ended the drought—from mid-April until October or November” (Diana V. Edelman, “Rizpah,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 5:776).

23. Elder Charles H. Hart, Conference Report, October 1916, 128; emphasis added. Located online at <http://search.ldslibrary.com/article/view/258276> (accessed September 24, 2008).

24. Spencer W. Kimball, “Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters,” *Ensign*, November 1978, 105.

25. Russell M. Nelson, “Our Sacred Duty to Honor Women,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 38.

26. Susan W. Tanner, “Strengthening Future Mothers,” *Ensign*, June 2005, 25.

27. This information primarily comes from Meyers, *Women in Scripture*. The Web sites www.alabaster-jars.com/womenindex.html and www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/women.html were also consulted, in addition to original research done by the authors.

28. It is not clear whether Azubah² or Jerioth is the mother of these sons.

29. It is possible that Bathsheba is an alternate form of Bath-shua, in which case she is also the mother of Shimea, Shobab, and Nathan (see 1 Chronicles 3:5).

30. It is not clear whether Azubah² or Jerioth is the mother of these sons.

31. Although it is not specified that Jezebel is the mother of these individuals, contextual evidence makes it appear likely. See also the entry “Athaliah” in the Bible Dictionary.