Two years ago I took a sabbatical to write a book entitled *The Marys of the Bible: The Original #MeToo Movement*. It was a book I had promised one of my female PhD students in India, with her own #MeToo story, that I would write. Her question to me was, “What does the Bible have to say to help women like me?” I promised her that I would write a book in response to her question.

About the same time I began my research on the book, millions of women across the world joined the #MeToo movement. During my research, I visited several parts of the world, like the Kakuma Refugee Camp where there are more than 800,000 refugees. I heard many #MeToo stories in these places. These stories fueled my urgency to write this book, which I published last year.

So, what does the Bible have to say in response to the issues raised by the #MeToo movement?

It seems to me that the central response to this question is the name of Jesus the Messiah’s mother—Mary. The name *Mary* means “one who has endured much pain and suffering.” It was a common name given to girls in the first century, especially in villages like Nazareth. The Holy Land was ruled by one invading force after another for several centuries. Each time an invading army would take control of the Holy Land, they would take away some bright boys as captives and reeducate them to be subject to the victorious king. The girls and women of the towns and villages were then raped by invading armies. Rape was a method of war and subjugation.

During the time of Jesus, the Sadducees, a political party, were in control of towns and villages. They had tax collectors who would subjugate common people to debt slavery. They then handed over girls from towns and villages to Roman soldiers as sexual slaves, to curry favor with them. Because of this horrible system, whenever a girl was born the parents would, in all sadness, name the baby Mary. They knew that the life of this girl would be bitter and painful. During his childhood days, Jesus would have undoubtedly seen many of the girls from Nazareth taken into sexual slavery by the Roman soldiers.
Why was Jesus’ mother called Mary? Why were all these other women called Mary?
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A girl was born, the parents would, in all sadness, name the baby Mary. They knew that the life of this girl would be bitter and painful. During his childhood days, Jesus would have undoubtedly seen many of the girls from Nazareth taken into sexual slavery by the Roman soldiers. For this reason, during his lifetime, Jesus reached out to several women. He spoke with them. He brought healing to their deeply wounded souls.

At the end of his life, when Jesus was hanging from the cross, all his disciples, except for John the Beloved, deserted him. It is quite telling that all his closest associates, at this most crucial moment in his life—his death on the cross—were all women. They were all called Mary.

Why was Jesus’ mother called Mary? Why were all these other women called Mary?

The obvious answer, which we can miss quite easily, is because another important woman in the Bible was called Mary, or Miriam: Moses’ sister. She was called Mary because during her time the Egyptians would come into the slave dwellings of the Hebrew people and rape Hebrew girls. They would rape Hebrew girls so that their progeny would neither be accepted by the Hebrews nor by the Egyptians. Their progeny would be slaves. When boys were born to the slave women, Pharaoh ordered the boys to be killed. Pharaoh did not want a rebellion led by young men, so the women were taken as sexual slaves.

Miriam proceeds to reflect on how God created a new people out of the waters of the womb of the sea. In the same womb of the sea, the enemies, the gods of Egypt, were destroyed. In many senses this song of Miriam parallels God’s act of creation at the beginning of time and history. Genesis 1:2 gives the picture of the earth being a horrible disaster. In Hebrew, the words are tohu vavohu. There was darkness over the deep waters, just like at the bottom of the sea. Yet, above this place, “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” This is a picture of the birthing waters. The Spirit of God, right in the midst of a picture of horrible darkness and destruction, gave birth to the good universe. The same Spirit of God breathed on the waters of the Red Sea and gave birth to a new people. And so Miriam sang with joy for the people, “You (O LORD) have created.” (Exod. 15:16).

Miriam goes on to prophesy regarding the future (Exod. 15:16–17). Jerusalem and the temple were the final...
The next time we encounter Miriam is after the Hebrew slaves crossed the Red Sea. This time she is called Miriam the Prophetess (Exod. 15:20) and she leads the people in a prophetic song. It is as if she has experienced transformational healing from her horrible experiences as a slave girl.

paradigm of the salvation of Miriam’s people. Their hope would come from the Messiah, the One who endured so much shame and pain.

The history of the world has shown that this prophecy of Miriam had partial fulfilment in the temple that was built in Jerusalem. However, the final fulfillment of Miriam’s dream will happen when the Messiah returns. He will bring with him a new Jerusalem and a new temple (Rev. 21).

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was born in a world very similar to the world of Miriam, the sister of Moses. This time the pain, rape, and suffering happened at the hands of the Romans. It is significant that the response of Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also found in a song very similar to the song sung by Miriam, the sister of Moses. It is called the Magnificat.

The context of this song is two women—Elizabeth and Mary—talking to each other. What were they talking about? Obviously, things that women talk about, throughout history, when they have encountered so much pain and shame. Mary knew that there was one person with whom she could share her deepest pains and struggles. Yes, she was a virgin. But, she had seen so many Marys, her friends, who had been raped by the cruel Roman soldiers. Somehow, by God’s grace, one Mary escaped the cruelty of the Roman soldiers. Yet, the pain of her friends was her pain.

Then there was the enigma. She was miraculously pregnant by the Holy Spirit. This was God’s supernatural doing—an inexplicable miracle. So, she needed to process all this with her trusted cousin. Right in the midst of this conversation, Mary breaks out into a song:

My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.
(Luke 1:46–56)

Just like the Miriam of Exodus, she expresses complete faith in the Lord, her savior. Just like the Miriam of old, she expresses that this God experientially knows her state of humiliation. Just like the Miriam of old, she also praises God for his victory over all the Roman divine kings. Just like Miriam of Exodus, she expresses the thought that the destitute people will be fed by the Lord. This was a promise that God made to Abraham. He fulfilled this promise during the time of Moses and Miriam.

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Seven #MeToo Principles

Here are seven principles we can draw from the parallels in the songs of Miriam, the sister of Moses, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, for the #MeToo movement:

1. The womb principle:
   A crucial response to the suffering of both Miriam, the sister of Moses, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, is addressed in what I call, the womb principle. Mary, the mother of Jesus, reflects on the “mercy” of God (Luke 1:50, 54). The Hebrew word for “mercy” is racham, which literally means womb. It is clear that Mary, in her song, saw God renewing the work of the Exodus through the birthing waters of her womb.

2. The Magnificat principle:
   Despite the injustices of human powers over women, in the end the LORD will be magnified. In both the poems, Miriam, the sister of Moses, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, both sing songs in the face of unimaginable suffering. Miriam and Mary praise the LORD (Exod. 15:1; Luke 1:46).

3. The Yeshua principle:
   Despite the injustices of human powers over women, in the end the LORD’s salvation will break through. Both express their complete hope in the yeshua, or the salvation of God (Exod. 15:2; Luke 1:47). This is quite a poignant statement in light of the name the angel of the LORD told Mary to give her son: Yeshua, salvation (Luke 1:31).

4. The hope principle:
   Despite the injustices of human powers over women, God will fulfill his promises. Both acknowledge the faithfulness of the promises of the LORD God. Miriam calls him, “my father’s God,” who always faithfully keeps his promises (Exod. 15:2). Mary, the mother of Jesus, acknowledges that the LORD will keep his promises made “to Abraham and his descendants forever” (Luke 1:55).

5. The strength principle:
   Despite the injustices of human powers, women will find strength in the LORD to overcome human evil. Both acknowledge that their strength comes from the Lord (Exod. 15:2; Luke 1:51). In those days, as it is today, women were relegated to a place of weakness. But God always provides strength. Both songs affirm this God-given capacity among women.

6. The empowerment principle:
   The power of the powerful is weakened, and the weakness of the weak is empowered. Both Miriam and Mary sing about how mighty soldiers and rulers and the rich will be humbled and brought low by the LORD for their sins against the vulnerable (Exod. 15:9–10; Luke 1:52–53).

7. The resting principle:
   Based on the above principles, both Miriam and Mary’s songs end in a note of restfulness. Miriam’s song ends with the LORD’s eternal reign in his sanctuary with his people (Exod. 15:17–18). Mary’s song poignantly ends with a brief phrase, “Mary remained” (my own translation). It was as if Mary was unmoved and contented with the fact that God was in control.

Listen to the Marys

The Marys of the world, throughout history, have endured so much pain and suffering. The Bible indeed shows the original #MeToo movement. The two songs of the two Marys—Miriam, the sister of Moses, and Mary, the mother of Jesus the Messiah—exemplify this best.

May my sisters take hope from these two songs.

May my brothers learn from the Marys of the Bible, and the Marys of the world, today.

Boaz Johnson is professor of biblical and theological studies at North Park University in Chicago. He is a board member of CBE International. Boaz has a PhD from Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL. He has taught internationally. Boaz’s wife is a clinical mental therapist. They have four grown children and seven grandchildren.