

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. David Pulman

Women of faith: Jochebed

Introduction - Jochebed

Good morning. We commence a new series of talks on "Women of Faith". The first talk is about Jochebed, a woman who is only referred to twice by name in the Bible. Jochebed is the wife of Amram of the family of Levi. Jochebed and Amram are the parents of Miriam, Aaron and Moses. In Numbers 26:59 we are given this detail, "*The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and to Amram she bore Aaron and Moses and their sister Miriam*", (see also Exodus 6:20). In the scriptures Miriam is mentioned last although she was probably the eldest as this is implied in that she looked out for Moses when, as a baby, he was in the ark of bulrushes in the river (see Exodus 2:1-10).

Although only mentioned by name twice (Exodus 6:20, Numbers 26:59), Jochebed is the central character in Exodus 2:1-10, which we shall consider a little later. A person of faith need not be mentioned much in the Bible, but what is said can be of considerable importance and valuable for our own encouragement as we seek to live faithfully for our Saviour and Lord.

Jochebed lived in the most trying of circumstances. The nation of Israel were living in Goshen, Egypt. They had once been a free people, invited into the country because of Joseph, Egypt's saviour, read Genesis 47. But now they were slaves. The current Pharaoh was afraid of this foreign people who had been living in his country for about 400 years (see Exodus 1:8-12). Numerically they had grown more numerous than the Egyptians (see Exodus 1:7). They had prospered, having left their tents and built houses (see Exodus 1:14). Their livestock was great and certainly in the early years they had become Pharaoh's livestock managers.

Pharaoh was becoming a desperate man and was trying to control this people through slavery, making them unpaid workers on his massive civil building projects. He presumably hoped this hard physical work would kill off and reduce their numbers. However, contrary to expectation, the Israelites continued to increase numerically (Exodus 1:12). Pharaoh became more desperate and enforced a form of genocide demanding that male children be killed at birth. Exodus 1:16-22 details this and shows how God intervened, preserving His people through faithful midwives who revered God more than they feared Pharaoh (Exodus 1:17, 21). The preciousness of life is a situation where we follow God's directions and not ungodly laws of rulers and governments. Additionally, we have the faithful individuals such as Jochebed.

This situation must have been a living nightmare for Israelite parents. There were no scans in those days, so the sex of the child was not known until the baby was born! If a girl, then the baby was safe. If the child was a boy, then the sentence of death hung over him. We are not told how many children died but we are told about Moses and how faith in action preserved him because God wanted to use him both as a leader and deliverer of His people.

Jochebed's faith

Before going into the detail of Jochebed's faith in action, let us look at Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11 is the chapter of the "heroes of faith". Hebrews 11:23 states, "*By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.*"

I would like to highlight four things in particular from this verse.

1. "They saw"
2. "They saw he was a beautiful child"
3. "They were not afraid"
4. "Hidden three months"

1. "They saw"

We see that both parents were credited with faith. An essential ingredient for a Christian home is that both parents are believers. This has a message for young Christian men and women in that the starting point for a marriage partner is that the person is a Christian and they have the same convictions about the Christian faith. This is necessary so that the Christian witness is the same from both in the marriage. We know from this verse that Amram and Jochebed lived this way. They were willing to act in the same way.

2. "They saw he was a beautiful child"

The word translated "beautiful" in the New King James Version is translated in some versions as, "no ordinary child", "an unusual child", "of rare beauty", "a proper child" and "a goodly child". From these variations, we gain a strong impression that the parents saw a child that was very special. Now I know that all parents see their children as very special but I think that God is saying in His holy record that Moses was a bit more special. Why? Because God, knowing the future saw the man that would eventually lead His people out of Egypt (Exodus 14:1-31) and I believe God gave this same impression upon the hearts of Amram and Jochebed.

3. "They were not afraid"

This is such a simple statement and it is mentioned in the context of Pharaoh's genocide command. They knew that if they were found out the child would die and possibly they themselves be punished. This is faith with a conviction that is strong enough to defy the evil monarch's ungodly command.

4. "Hidden three months"

This is faith in action. What they saw in the child and the fact that they were not afraid needed to be put into action. The child is hidden for the first three months. They did not put him in the pram at the front door or in the garden! No, he was kept hidden and that is no easy thing to do as a child often cries in the early days for food, nappy change or simply wants attention and a cuddle. These are normal things, so to keep him hidden and not to alert neighbours or the military would be stressful. This would be doubly so at night when sounds are more noticeable and seem magnified in the silence. Most of this stress would fall upon Jochebed, as we suppose Amram would be working as a slave on one of Pharaoh's projects.

Jochebed's care for Moses

Let us read Exodus 2:1-10, "*And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi. So the woman conceived and bore a son. And **when she saw** that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months. But when she could no longer hide him, **she took an ark** of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank. And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him. Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.' Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, '**Shall I go and call a nurse** for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?' And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Go.' So the maiden went and **called the child's mother**. Then 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. And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, 'Because I drew him out of the water.'*"

Take time after this broadcast to read again these Exodus 2:1-10 to see the faith of both Jochebed and her daughter Miriam in action.

As we read this account in Exodus 2:1-10 there are a number of simple but important points to consider. Unlike Hebrews 11:23, here in Exodus the focus is upon Jochebed, "*When she saw that he was a beautiful child*" (Exodus 2:2). It is the mother who becomes the example of faith in action. It is the normal thing for a mother to have a strong bond with her child. For nine months, the child has grown inside the womb and developed from a single but complex cell into the wonderful and marvellous person of a baby. Without going into the complex structure of DNA, in Psalm 139:14, the psalmist says to God, "*I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are Your works.*" The word translated "wonderfully" does have the meaning of distinct, different and separate. This is not said of any other creature. Here God is quietly saying through the psalmist that humans are entirely different from the rest of creation and that evolution has no place in all of God's creation, no matter what some may say.

After three months, Jochebed realises that the child can no longer be hid (Exodus 2:3). Is Jochebed abandoning her child? Not so. Here is faith once again in action and we are given a lot more in the way of the careful preparations that

faith demands. You might ask. "How can you put faith and human actions together?" Are they not mutually exclusive? The Christian faith is not irresponsible. If by faith there are things we can do, then God expects us to do them.

So what are the preparations that Jochebed made? First, Jochebed obtains a basket made from bulrushes and then makes it waterproof (Exodus 2:3). In other words, we have an ark or small boat which will float. Then the child is placed inside, no doubt securely wrapped to keep warm and to be comfortable and then placed among the reeds at the edge of the river (Exodus 2:3). Finally, Jochebed ensured that someone is on hand to keep a watchful eye on the ark, so Miriam is given the task to watch from a short distance away (Exodus 2:4). Not too near to draw attention to the ark, but also not too far away. For the moment, Jochebed has done all that she can do, the next steps are in God's hand.

Almost immediately, Pharaoh's daughter and her female servants come down to the river to bathe (Exodus 2:5). This implies that this was a stretch of the river where men would have to keep well away. No fear of Pharaoh's soldiers coming along unexpectedly! No Hebrew men would be allowed in the vicinity either. So we have a 'women only' area of the river, and possibly only those from Pharaoh's household. Jochebed has chosen wisely to hide the child in this stretch of river.

In the purposes of God the ark is spotted, and when the cover is taken off the floating basket, the child cries (Exodus 2:6). The heart of Pharaoh's daughter is touched. She knows it is a Hebrew child, but it is nevertheless a young child, first and foremost. Her heart is touched and moved with compassion. Her total reaction is enough for the next move.

Miriam, who may well have been coming nearer to this royal crowd, hears the compassion as Pharaoh's daughter says "*This is one of the Hebrews' children*" (Exodus 2:6). Miriam speaks up and poses the question, "*Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?*" (Exodus 2:7). We can see that God's wisdom is in Miriam's words. A question, so that the decision belongs to Pharaoh's daughter! It is just at the right moment when her heart is moved with compassion. It solves a problem as to how to look after the child to whom she has now become immediately attached. The opening lines from one of William Cowper's hymns state:

*"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform."*

Jochebed's faith in action has achieved for the moment her desired end, the safety of her child. The bonus to this is the opportunity to nurse and raise the child in the early formative years, providing the foundation for Moses to know who he is. In addition, Jochebed is to be paid to be the nurse to her own child! (Exodus 2:9) Is this an early form of child benefit?!

Eventually Jochebed must relinquish Moses into the home of Pharaoh for his daughter to raise as her own son (see Exodus 2:11). Is this the end of Jochebed's involvement? God's word would imply that all direct contact was now lost and we hear no more of Jochebed. But, in another sense, her godly influence would continue for many years to come.

Jochebed's legacy - Moses knew who he was

In those early years, as Jochebed nursed and raised her son, what was she doing? One thing becomes clear from Exodus 2:11, "*Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to **his brethren** and looked at their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of **his brethren**.*" In this verse, we are told that although raised in Pharaoh's house as a son of the royal family, Moses was very aware of who his real people were. Twice in this verse we have the short phrase "*his brethren*". Moses might never have seen his parents again but he would see his brother and sister. He knew he was not an Egyptian. He knew he was a Hebrew. This is part of Jochebed's enduring legacy to Moses.

As parents, what do we give our children in the early months and years of their lives? Do we read the scriptures to them before they can even speak or read for themselves? Do we sing to our child? Colossians 3:16 states, "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*" This is not only for your church fellowship services. Singing is for the home as well. It is said of John Newton that he wrote many simple hymns to capture scriptural truths. In this way, he helped his congregation to learn the Word of God while they enjoyed singing. The same thought is put in a different way in Proverbs 22:6, "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*" As Christian parents, we should all want our children to whole heartedly embrace the Christian faith for their eternal blessing. It is never too early therefore, to start on vital Christian parenting.

Stephen, in Acts 7:17-36, gives a very comprehensive account of the life of Moses which I commend to your reading. Moses lived to be 120 years old. From this Acts 7:17-36 we learn that his life was divided into three periods of 40

years. For 40 years he was in Pharaoh's house, the second forty years he lived, married and worked in the area of the wilderness of Sinai.

In the wisdom of God, Moses receives the best possible education and training to be a practical leader to a vast army of people, "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:21). But his rash action at the age of 40, when he murdered an Egyptian (Acts 7:24), was not the way God works. Violence against others is not a Christian choice. Because of this, Moses eventually runs away to live in obscurity for another 40 years. Moses must unlearn some of the ways of the world, such as violence. We might say he is learning to be nobody.

It is not until he is 80 years old that God intervenes and calls him to the work that God has prepared for him. The skills of Egypt will be useful. The skills he has learned while becoming nobody will also be useful. Moses has learned about family life and its responsibility to care and provide for his wife and children. His occupation as a shepherd (see Exodus 3:1) gave him the skills necessary to care, feed and protect those who cannot do these things for themselves. These are just as essential, if not more so, as the skills he learned in Egypt.

Who would have thought, when Jochebed placed her son in the waterproof basket in the river, that her act of faith would be responsible, in God's hands, to make Moses the leader that God wanted and needed for His people Israel!

To Conclude

If it was not for Jochebed's faith, then Moses would not have been the man he was, a man useful to God. Jochebed's faith is an encouragement to us all. We might not play a major role in our church or fellowship. In fact, we might be little thought about by others. But this is not important. It is our faith and how we live out our faith that is important to God. It is necessary for us to realise this. Being faithful makes us a useful weapon in the hands of God and when this is true then His wonders can be performed.

I quoted earlier two lines from a hymn by William Cowper. I would like to close by quoting all of the hymn and to say thank you for listening this morning.

*God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and will break
In blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.*

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