

GOD PORTRAYS MORE WOMEN

by

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CHAPTER THREE

JOCHEBED

(Exodus 2)

“AND THERE WENT A MAN of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi.”

The marriage of this as yet unnamed man and woman took place in very difficult days, days when the oppression of labor was very great. Some might have advised this young couple against marriage in such hard times. Yet marriage is designed for mutual society, help and comfort in prosperity and in adversity, in sickness and in health, till death do us part. Spiritual and family life do much to alleviate the stress and struggles of living.

This particular period of trial for these descendants of Abraham had been foretold to him at least four hundred years previously. Since that day many generations followed—Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath to Amram, the bridegroom of our story who married his aunt, his father’s sister, Jochebed. We get their names in Exodus 6:20. God had told Abraham about this time of distress.

“Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years. And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance” (Genesis 15:13, 14).

Stephen, referring to this time in Acts 7, said: **“But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. In which time Moses was born”** (Acts 7:17-20).

When Joseph was Prime Minister of Egypt, his brethren were smiled upon or tolerated. They came as shepherds, and Joseph had told his brothers on arriving, **“every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians”** (Genesis 46:34). This very scorn contributed to family development, the contempt preserved them from intermarrying with idol-worshiping Egyptians. Sometimes unpopularity saves us from many temptations. **“This smoking furnace,”** as it was called in Genesis 15:17, held a **“burning lamp”** promise of deliverance and guidance for the path.

When Amram came home at night to his bride, you might have heard her asking, “How did you get along today, Amram?”

“Jochebed, you have no idea what we have to put up with from those cruel, unreasonable bosses set over us to drive and flog us if we waste a moment. Working on those buildings or in the hot close canal is almost intolerable. If it continues, I fear a revolt from our people. Really, if it weren’t for you, Jochebed, life wouldn’t be worth living.”

“Thanks, Amram, for the compliment, but we must not forget God’s promise that He would avenge the cruelty, and I guess He can handle that better than we can and with no mistakes, **‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord’** (Romans 12:19). If we avenged ourselves in the heat of our anger we might do things we would regret. But don’t you remember what God told Father Abraham, **‘That nation whom they shall serve, will I judge’** (Genesis 15:14)? Perhaps we would do better to commit this trying thing to Him. We’ll feel better after we pray about it.”

“But, Jochebed, it seems as if that time that God spoke of to Father Abraham were almost up. Well then, our redemption draweth near.”

“But I wonder whom God will use to deliver us. In olden days He used Noah and Joseph. Oh, that we could have a child that God could use to deliver us from such cruel bondage!”

In later years when Hannah saw the corruption of the priesthood, she prayed for a child that she might give to the Lord to meet the crisis of that day.

Soon a little daughter was given to Amram and Jochebed. She was a lively, happy, precocious child. We will learn more about her in another chapter. About twelve years passed before another baby arrived, and to their joy it was a boy whom they called Aaron. After his birth the edict went forth that all the male children should be killed at birth, truly infanticide on a large scale. Their lives were made bitter with hard bondage, they made them serve with rigor, but this edict designed to exterminate the race was the most bitter of all.

Thus Satan attempted to thwart God’s promise of the Messiah. He repeated it again in Esther’s day and once more in the days of Herod in the massacre of the infants in Bethlehem. But there is almost irony in the way God counteracts evil.

At this very time God gave this godly couple a babe who was to be the emancipator of His people, and planted that child to be trained for him in the very palace where such tyranny originated. Surely He can make the wrath of man to praise Him!

“In which time Moses was born” (Arts 7:20).

He came, apparently, at a most inauspicious time, at a moment of utmost discouragement. I suppose Jochebed wouldn’t even allow a midwife to attend her at the time of her confinement lest she suffer from the king’s wrath.

As the parents beheld the babe of their prayers, they were thoroughly convinced that God had a purpose for this child. **“When she saw that he was a goodly child [or fair to God], she hid three months”** (2:2). Acts 7:20 says, **“In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair,”** and Hebrews 11:23: **“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.”**

The comeliness of countenance of David, Daniel, Esther, and Solomon is also noted in Scripture. It would be most difficult to keep the child’s presence a secret with a sister just in her teens and a little brother three years old. This was at not only heroism of mother-love but the heroism of faith or confidence in God’s purposes, as Hebrews 11 informs us.

There is a remarkable passage in Micah 6:3, 4, where the Lord pleads in such touching tones: **“O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me. For I brought thee out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.”**

What an encouragement this is for parents to know the interest God has in the life of each individual child! It should indeed cast them much on the Lord that they may be given daily wisdom and patience and grace to help mold that child according to God’s purpose for him or her, **“I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.”**

This is in the reverse order of birth, yet God sent each to fill his own niche as well as to be the complement of each other. He has a purpose not only for the boys but also for the girls.

“Through faith he was hid”—not the faith of the child but by the faith of the parents. Does it not remind us of the advent of the greater than Moses? An edict was given for the destruction of the child Jesus, but Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt for the protection of the **“Saviour which should come into the world.”**

How glad Amram must have been that he had married a girl of **“like precious faith”** and who was to him all the spiritual help she should be in a time of crisis!

Faith in the Lord does not shut out or prevent works, but faith is justified by its works. Neither does faith exclude common sense but acts sensibly. Jochebed realized that she could no longer hide the baby. They not only prayed but they did something about the situation. How earnestly they planned for the child’s safety! Carefully Jochebed selected the reeds and wove them into a basket, then plastered it with slime and pitch inside and out to make it waterproof. As they worked on the little **“ark of bulrushes,”** did they recall the ark that outrode the waters of judgment in Noah’s day preserving his family because he believed God?

Every mother is made to realize there are moments in life that her arms cannot envelope and protect her child. It needs stronger arms—the everlasting arms—underneath her child. It is a difficult moment when she must **“cast him out.”** But be sure to **“cast him out”** into the care of God.

“And she put child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river’s brink” (2:3).

With tears, kisses, and prayers she pushed him the water and went home to wait for God’s salvation. She not only waited but **“watched unto prayer.”** She set Miriam to watch what the Lord would do. I believe God honors such faith as He did that of the parents of Moses. For this very act of faith Moses’ parents are mentioned in Hebrews 11, the believers’ Hall of Fame.

“And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river . . . and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him” (2:5, 6).

How timely and opportune are all God’s ways in answer to our faith! To accomplish His purposes He used most natural means, a mother’s love, a sister’s care, a baby’s tears, a princess’ pity. No doubt that beautiful face in the basket had its appeal, and the tears added to it. As she noted the careful construction of the ark to preserve the child, she realized all the mother-love behind it, and the shock and pain to every Hebrew mother occasioned by her father’s cruel edict; a revolt against such inhuman treatment welled up within her, and she determined to rebuke such inhumanity to man. **“This babe shall not die, I’ll keep him myself.”**

At the psychological moment, Miriam, no doubt a pretty girl of fourteen or fifteen, who was decorously **“standing afar off”** appeared and suggested that the baby was hungry. **“Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?” (2:7).**

How wisely worded for her years, how self-controlled not to betray the fact the baby was her brother, and that she would get her mother to nurse the babe! **“And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, Go” (2:8).** Did ever feet go so fast? Were ever words tumbled out so excitedly to a mother? Was there ever a woman who walked with a more praiseful heart than Jochebed, as she came to the river to meet the princess? From Pharaoh’s daughter’s arms Jochebed received her own child, but she took the child, I am sure, as directly from the arms of God. She never forgot the princess’ words, **“Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages” (2:9).**

When a mother embraces her child for the first time, she should hear the same words from the Lord himself: **“Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will thee thy wages.”** After all, God is the Creator of life and has first claim, and that which we think is ours is lent to us to bring up for Him. We love to possess but we all have learn to relinquish. And Jochebed took the child and nursed it.

“And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, because I drew him out of the water” (2:10).

Jochebed used well those early years of training little Moses. She knew the foundation of character and fear of God must be laid in those tender years, and she surely made the most of her opportunities, for the principles instilled then steadied him through the years of temptation, ambition and favor. It is hard to obliterate the training we get in our early days.

How one rejoices over the parents who are careful to read the Scriptures each day with their families and encourage them by precept and example to take every concern in life to the Lord and instill in their minds the fact that “it matters to him about them”! Every falling sparrow is His concern and **“even the very hairs of your head are all numbered,”** and **“ye are of more value than many sparrows”** (Luke 12:7). I vividly recall leaving for an examination at school the words given my anxious mind by my dear mother, **“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God”** (James 1:5); and of definite answers to the requests for help and wisdom.

As a family, I think, we are more grateful for the spiritual heritage given us daily in the family instruction and prayer, which indeed proved to be a hedge about us, than for the other secular advantages which were added. I am thankful the good old-fashioned family prayers are not extinct.

As the child grew, I suppose Pharaoh’s daughter paid frequent visits to Jochebed’s home and noted with pride and affection the development of the child of her compassions, and occasionally she would invite the mother to bring little Moses to see her. I think Miriam would always ask to go along. But the day came when Jochebed had to relinquish Moses.

Did she have any misgivings? Did her relatives and neighbors irritate her by asking, “How can you do it, Jochebed?” Or saying, “Surely, you won’t hand your child over to a heathen court?”

I think I see her a perfect lady (a lady never makes a fuss). She would quietly say, “When Moses was three months old, I had ‘to cast him out,’ but I cast him into the care of God. He did not fail me. I have proved Him, I dare not doubt Him.” **“As for God, his way is perfect”** (Psalm 18:30), **“for he giveth not account of any of his matters”** (Job 33:13). He does not have to give account to me. I know Him well enough to trust Him without questioning.

And this relinquishing day comes to every mother, it comes in stages mercifully. For no mother is all-sufficient for her child. The day of weaning is hard on both mother and child. The mother feels the child is no longer dependent on her, but is to develop by himself. The teacher must supplement the mother’s influence, the Sunday school too, those who minister the Word, those who teach the arts and graces.

As one looks back on life, how innumerable are those who have contributed to our development—physically, mentally? morally, and spiritually. But the parents have the blessed assurance: **“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it”** (Proverbs 22:6).

Christian parents often have serious qualms about sending their children to our public institutions of learning because of some of the teachings given there. Christian colleges have been founded, but even these have not always remained true to the faith. There is no place in the world where the Devil will not operate. We cannot take the children out of the world. If we did, they would find enough mischief in their own hearts. Walls will not exclude sin. The thing to do is to train the child in the fear of the Lord, and we shall realize God’s keeping power in an evil world.

Moses was kept all through his university training in all the learning of the Egyptians. Daniel was true to God in the halls of learning in Babylon. And today we find Christian witnesses in our British, American, and Canadian universities, for which we give hearty thanks to God.

Jochebed's life with her teenage family would be as difficult as any other mother's. "How perfectly wonderful," some would exclaim, "to have three such gifted children!" It not given to every mother to have all her children leaders each in his own sphere. Miriam was the prophetess, poet and singer; Aaron, the high priest and prophet; Moses, prophet and the emancipator of Israel. Jochebed's own name means, "*God my glory*." She was truly a godly woman putting spiritual things first. "**Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall added unto you**" (Matthew 6:33).

Many a mother is more ambitious for her family than she has been for herself. But Jochebed was ambitious for God and instilled into her children what she knew of the mind of God. For a prophet is one inspired by God to speak in His name the message appropriate for the time. No doubt the family spoke quite naturally about the Lord's dealings.

Gifted children and those who would be leaders are not always the easiest people with whom to live. They frequently expect others to cater to them and assist in their advancement, taking for granted that others should deny themselves for their education and for the privilege of serving them in menial ways, very often without any expression of gratitude or appreciation of such kindness. They accept all as a matter of course.

Jochebed, too, had her anxieties as her children grew older, and she recognized their weaknesses and faults. She had to betake herself to her knees when she saw the tendencies to jealousy in Miriam and her insistence on always demanding first consideration. She wouldn't play at all unless she were first. Then Aaron loved to be popular with the crowd; if he were with the right crowd, he would be popular in what was right; if with the wrong crowd, he would be leader in what was wrong. How she would pray for stability and backbone for her boy!

Then Moses, the child of God's purpose as she firmly believed, how she would pray daily that God would keep him from the evil of the court life, keep him pure! "Train him for Thyself, Lord, may he not be so conceited and impulsive and self-confident." We can almost hear her fervent words. Then she would remind the Lord, "Surely the time of redemption must be drawing nigh, we have been truly afflicted almost four hundred years. O Lord, deliver us by whomsoever Thou wilt. How glad we would be if our children were usable in Thy hands to emancipate Thy people! May they be humble enough to walk with God, and be meet and prepared for the Master's use."

I do not know whether Jochebed and Amram witnessed Moses' graduation from the university, but it wouldn't be surprising if they were in the crowd at the capital to see the triumphal march as Moses returned from his "**mighty deeds**", of which Acts 7 speaks.

It will be a privilege to meet Elijah; and Moses whom Peter and John saw at the transfiguration, but nonetheless will be the privilege of meeting that godly woman who sought to mold her family, not for her glory, nor for their glory, but for the glory of God.

“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (I Corinthians 1:31).

“Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:23, 24).

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