



Faith in the Hour of Crisis

Jochebed, a rather unfamiliar-sounding name, is nevertheless associated with one of the most well-known names in biblical history, namely Moses, the “founding father” of the nation Israel. From Exodus 6:20, one can tell that this quietly remarkable woman of faith is the wife of Amram, and mother of Aaron and Moses.

Though not mentioned by name, she is clearly alluded to in the Gospel’s “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11. “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” (Hebrews 11:23). Since the newborn Moses was

too young to exercise any faith, the subject of “faith” here has to refer to his God-fearing parents, particularly his mother. Scripture tells us it was “she (who) hid him three months” (Exodus 2:2b), and that he was “nourished up (which implies being breastfed) in his father’s house three months” (Acts 7:20b). Jochebed did all these in courageous defiance of the king’s vicious commandment, because of faith.

Now, the believer’s faith is not blind faith, apart from God’s Word. Although there was no Scripture yet (as the first 5 books written by Moses were yet future at that point in time), the Hebrew people would surely have remembered Joseph’s last words: “I

die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Genesis 50:24). This was an echo of God’s irrevocable promise to Abraham that they would be afflicted “in a land that is not theirs ... 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). Jochebed, during this hour of crisis, must have believed and embraced this divine revelation, looking forward to the ever approaching time of God’s promised deliverance for her family and people.

God’s Preparation of the Hebrew Nation

God had begun His chosen nation with the divine call of Abraham and was going to make of him “a great nation” (Genesis 12:1-2). Almost 400 years had already passed in Egypt just prior to Moses’ birth. Over the intervening decades and centuries, God’s people might have forgotten, but not God. In fact, God was about to finalise His preparations for the founding of that nation.

Of course, God’s ways are higher than man’s ways (Isaiah 55:9). His “preparations” involved not only abundant increase in the Hebrew population [relatively isolated from the Egyptians in the land of Goshen (cf. Genesis 46:34), until “the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7)], but also political oppression and slavery. This was to instil in them a yearning to leave, not stay when the time came for their exodus. The

Egyptian Pharaoh viewed these rapidly increasing foreign people as a threat to his political power. By dealing oppressively with them, their freedom was not only restricted, they also constituted a large labour force for the Egyptians’ building projects, like the “treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses” (cf. Exodus 1:9-11). This cruel exploitation actually played into God’s Hand; it served to keep the Hebrew people distinct and separate (with continued high fertility rate), while making them all the more desirous to leave.

Then came the Hebrews’ darkest hour in their Egyptian stay. When Pharaoh realised that the blatant schemes to get rid of the Hebrews by “rigour” or hard labour had gone awry and instead “the more they multiplied and grew” (cf. Exodus 1:12, 14), he ordered the genocide of Hebrew baby boys! The first (more subtle) approach was by instigating midwifery malpractice, which failed because of non-cooperation from the God-fearing midwives (Exodus 1:15-17). The second (downright blatant) approach was by drowning the newborn boys, which succeeded because of manipulation of his people’s fears and xenophobic prejudice (Exodus 1:22)!

God’s Preparation of His People’s “Deliverer”

Into this historically tumultuous setting was to be born God’s deliverer for His people. He had to be born in a time of great national crisis; otherwise there would be no urgent need of a deliverer. That was not all. He had to be instructed in the

things of God, including his people's history and the divine promises to his forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That would mean he had to be born to (and nurtured by) God-fearing, dedicated, believing parents (particularly mother). This was next to impossible to realise, given Pharaoh's vicious edict on the decimation of Hebrew baby boys. Here's where the quietly determined, unafraid, devoted Jochebed came into the picture.

Furthermore, God's providential workings would see to it that he be highly educated and academically trained. He had to be a man of great leadership and intellectual skills, one who would be able to "stand before kings ... not stand before mean men" (cf. Proverbs 22:29). But this scenario was not humanly possible as the Hebrews were not treated as equals, but as slaves, with no opportunity for the best education of the land. But with God all things are possible. Being the Architect of world history, He could make all those seemingly conflicting conditions fit like clockwork and bring about a conducive chain of events, in preparation of His people's deliverer. Truly, "The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Proverbs 16:4).

Now, at the time Pharaoh commanded that the Hebrew baby boys be cast into the river, Jochebed could have been or was about to be pregnant with child. She might have prayerfully hoped to avoid this pregnancy. But "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Psalm 127:3). Well, it might be a girl, she

hoped. Those nine months must have been a most torturing wait for her – "Is it a boy or girl?" When the day of her delivery finally came, the midwife's reply to her all-important question was like a sword that pierced right into her heart, changing her – and her entire family's – life completely. Oh, how quick joy could turn into grief! Yet God's presence was with them. The moment she looked at her newborn – a very good-looking, beautiful child – something in his radiant countenance so stirred her up and told her it was no ordinary child. What downright cruelty to snuff out such a sweet, innocent life! To Jochebed, the king's wicked law must be defied because it ran counter to God's goodness and justice.

She determined to disregard the inhuman decree and protect her baby at all costs. When he became too noticeable to be hidden successfully in the house after 3 months, she resorted to putting him in "an ark of bulrushes", placed by the river bank, in the hope that he be rescued by some kind Egyptian soul. By God's providence, that kind soul happened to be none other than the Egyptian princess (Pharaoh's daughter) herself, who was moved with compassion for the helpless baby (cf. Exodus 2:5-6)! This had to be God's doing, including the name that the Egyptian princess later gave to this special Hebrew boy – "Mosheh", which literally means "drawing", alluding to her drawing him out of the water (cf. Exodus 2:10b). This was a most apt name, for God would in due time use him to draw His oppressed people out of Egyptian

bondage in the Exodus towards His promised land.

Far-Reaching Influence of a Mother's Unintimidated Faith

Desperate times call for desperate measures, together with a deepening of faith. The role Jochebed played in God's unfolding drama of His people's history was indispensable. Her unprecedented and unconventional actions worked out marvellously under God's providential care. Never in her wildest hopes did she expect her son to become adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and herself appointed as his nurse (cf. Exodus 2:8-9). That would mean she could openly care for her son without fear of harassment (given the legal protection of Pharaoh's daughter), and her son's access to the finest educational opportunities was assured. In fact, Scripture tells us that "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). Yet all of Egypt's training could not corrupt his heart's loyalty. This has to be attributed to his mother's faithful and committed nurturing and instructing during the first few years of his life.

Jochebed knew she had limited years to spend with young Moses;

it could be 6, 8 or 10 years before Pharaoh's daughter would call for him to live with her in the palace. She was determined to make those first few crucial years count by laying a firm spiritual foundation in his life. Scripture testifies of her far-reaching influence when Moses, having been nursed by his mother in his young, impressionable years, grew up "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). Thus, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king" (Hebrews 11:27a), just like his mother some 40 years ago (cf. Acts 7:23), who was "not afraid of the king's commandment". For there is a God in heaven whose counsel shall nevertheless stand, despite the many contrary devices of men's hearts (cf. Proverbs 19:21); and there is an infinitely higher authority to whom every man must give account.

Jochebed understood this and hence acted decisively in the hour of crisis, and thereby will be remembered by posterity as a woman whose unintimidated faith not only saved her son, but also ultimately paved the way for her nation's deliverance! ■

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