

Jochebed, A Great Mother Exodus 2:1-10

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A mother had worked hard with her little girl in teaching her a part for a church program. The little girl had gone over it again and again, but when she stood up in front of people her mouth went dry, and her mind went blank.

She didn't know what to say. Her mother, sitting in the front, tried to help by forming the opening words on her lips.

Nothing happened so, finally in desperation, she whispered, "*I am the light of the world.*" Immediately the girl's face lit up and in confidence she began, "*My mother is the light of the world.*"

Today we're going to look at a mother who was indeed a light in a world of darkness. Her name... Jochebed.

She was the mother of Moses, and like many mothers she's only known because of her children.

She's mentioned by name only in Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59, both genealogical listings. Her name means Glorious or God's Glory.

During the time when Moses was born, Pharaoh had made it so that Jewish men couldn't get an education but were forced to do manual labor.

They had no political rights and were essentially nothing more than slaves for the Egyptians.

In fact, just prior to Moses being born, Pharaoh made it more miserable for all the Jews by decreeing that all new-born boy babies were to be cast into the Nile.

It seemed that everything was against Jochebed being a mother much less a good mother because although she already had two children, Miriam and Aaron, she was expecting another child.

She may have even hoped it would be a girl, for then there would be no problem, but God's plans don't always call for a life with no problems, and so she gave birth to a boy.

It was, in a sense, a twin birth, for not only a great man but a great mother was born that day.

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In this birth we get a glimpse into Jochebed's wisdom because her mother-love refused to obey the law of wicked Pharaoh.

To him a baby boy was just a little enemy to be rid of before he became stronger, but she knew it was better to obey God than man.

Like all powers of evil, Pharaoh worked by brute force but one thing he didn't take into account was that babies have mothers, and a mother's love is stronger than evil.

Guided by the wisdom of God, a mother's love can outwit the devil himself. It was through motherhood that God sent His Son into the world to defeat Satan.

God found a faithful mother in Jochebed and through her He raised up a deliverer. The book of Hebrews says she acted in faith to save her child.

Hebrews 11:23, *"By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict."*

She trusted that this child was given to her by God for more than crocodile food. As William James said, *“a baby is a bundle of possibilities.”*

Jochebed felt this was the case for her baby boy. She vowed that no Pharaoh was going to make her give him up.

The very fact that Pharaoh wanted to get rid of babies is a testimony to the power of motherhood.

With the right mother a baby can grow up and be an overwhelming force for good which is why evil forces become baby killers.

It must have been hard for her to hide a baby like she did. The tension was probably beyond endurance. She realized she couldn't continue to hide the child, but she wasn't going to give it up.

How she must have prayed as she worked out her plan. Things looked dark, but she faced the dark future with the light of faith.

Sometimes we wonder about God's timing. For 400 years Israel was in Egypt, and God waited until Pharaoh ordered all boy babies to be killed before bringing Israel's deliverer onto the stage of history.

God obviously loves a challenge, and He loves to see His people face them and gain the victory. That's why God deliberately developed a context of great danger.

He knew Jochebed would be a strong mother because that was the only hope for Moses' survival.

She could've surrendered to the inevitable and obeyed this vicious law, as did many other mothers, but by faith she decided to buck the system.

She took the same paradoxical approach that God took. If He was going to give her a boy at the worst possible time, she, in turn, would hide that baby in the very spot where they were drowning the babies... right on the Nile's riverbank.

Logic would tell you that, if babies were being thrown into the river, it would be wise to take the baby as far from that danger as possible.

This is why the wisdom of a mother, if often not logical, is nevertheless effective. So, she hid him by the river.

We see two truths that are worth noting from Jochebed's dilemma. First, tension, anxiety and problems may come into a home, and into the life of a mother where God's plan will call forth the best in her.

Mothers, do you have the eye of faith that sees purpose even in problems, or do you let them defeat you and drag you down?

Second, God doesn't hand down a copy of the plan to be followed. He works within the intuition and thinking of the mother, just like He did with Jochebed.

Jochebed had to think up a plan herself and then proceed in faith, not knowing the outcome.

When we've done our best God will do the rest. In His providence, He will work out all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

Notice that faith isn't passive. You don't just say, "*I have faith that God will work it out,*" and then do nothing.

Faith without works is dead. Faith says that God will work out what I do. It's blind faith that says I'll do nothing and trust God to do it for me.

Faith doesn't say, *"I don't have to bother to put pitch on the basket. If it gets knocked into the river God will preserve the baby."* That is not faith, that's presumption.

A mother's wisdom is a wisdom that says, *"I must do those things that must be done and can be done by me, and then leave the results to God."*

She made an ark of papyrus and sealed it with pitch. She put it in a place where she knew the daughter of Pharaoh bathed since it was a religious duty to bathe in the sacred Nile.

So, when the daughter discovered the baby, Moses cried and won her heart. He was already a leader with powerful influence even as a baby.

Jochebed's wisdom was also proven when she let her teenage daughter, Miriam, help in this serious plan.

Miriam proved herself and, in obedience to her mother, became an important link in God's plan to deliver Israel.

It's a wise mother who recognizes the capacity of her teenagers and makes them a vital part of family plans.

I wonder if it ever occurs to a teenager that obedience to one's mother may be a necessary step in God's will for their life. Here was a mother and daughter team that God used to change the course of history.

Miriam approached the daughter of Pharaoh at an opportune time realizing the childless princess would need a wet nurse, and she volunteered to find her one. When the princess agreed, she ran to get her mother.

With a pounding heart from both fear and excitement Jochebed, trying to control her emotions, ran to the princess and received back her baby boy. Her wisdom, which ranks next to Solomon's, paid off.

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What a thrill it must have been to be able to mother her son without fear. Moses wasn't only safe, but by the grace of God he was back in his mother's care.

God knows the early years of a child are very important.

Jochebed probably only mothered him for 3 or 4 years, and some might feel that little can be done in that short time, but she had him for those years when love and security determine so much of a child's personality.

Modern psychologists tell us that what a mother does with her child in the first 3 or 4 years establishes attitudes and characteristics of the mind that influence a person's relationships and behavior the rest of their life.

This is important since the first and most enduring ideas of God come from parents.

Francis W. Parker, a distinguished Chicago educator, finished a lecture and a woman asked, "*How early can I begin the education of my child?*" Parker asked, "*When will your child be born?*"

She responded, "*Why he's already 5 years old.*" He cried, "*Good lord, you've already lost the best 5 years.*"

So important is the mother to a child that in most cases the will to live is lost without the mother. Without the love and security of a motherly nature, a baby will begin to die. The most important work of a mother is love.

The Jews have a saying, *“God could not be everywhere, so He made mothers.”* Written into the very nature of man is the need for love, and all men can see something of the love of God in the love of a mother.

Jochebed recognized this, and understood the basic truth that to raise a well-adjusted child who is ignorant of God is to fail as a mother.

She received her child from Pharaoh’s daughter for only awhile, but it’s true that all children are only given to our care for a short while.

If only we could realize how soon they’ll be in Pharaoh’s palace. If we haven’t prepared them, they’ll certainly fall into the trap of pleasure and sin. Better that to be eaten by crocodiles than to live without God.

Any mother who launches her child into the treacherous currents of modern life without the compass of faith in God as a guide is a failure as a mother.

Jochebed not only nursed his body but filled him with the milk of the Word.

We can only assume that there was continued contact even after he was given back to the princess, for there was so much to teach him that he could not learn as a young child.

She, no doubt, continued to have an influence in his life all the years he was growing up in the palace.

Mother’s Day is a day of praise and poetry of mothers, but not just for motherhood in itself. Just to physically bear children is a wonder, but not worthy of honor in itself.

As all too often, we see in the news stories of a mother who totally neglects her children, even sacrificing them for her own pleasure.

Many of those ungrateful goats at the day of judgment will be mothers. Mothers can lose all the blessings of motherhood by self-centeredness.

Jochebed was child-centered, not self-centered. She took great risks for the sake of her child.

She realized that a child can be the tool that God uses to change the future for good, and so she gave her all for the sake of making her baby the best possible instrument for God to use.

That's the goal of all mothers who want to be tools in the hands of God. You sacrifice for the sake of your child, but it's also for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Marlow Coffee Graham, the mother of Billy Graham said, *"When God and His Word are given their rightful place in the home it is then that we, who are mothers, have in some measure discharged our responsibility to those God has given us. Then, and only then, can we look at our children and at the future with confidence."*

Not all faithful mothers are raising a Moses or a Billy Graham, but all are great mothers, for, like Jochebed, they are doing the work which makes anyone great, and that's the work of imparting the knowledge of God to their children.

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So, is motherhood all sacrifice and no reward? No! Nothing done in God's will is without its reward.

The real payment Jochebed received was not the wages she got from Pharaoh's daughter, for out of Pharaoh's treasury came the support for the very child who'll one day be used of God to set His people free from Pharaoh.

This just shows us the humor of God, Pharaoh subsidized the very person planning his defeat.

On the basis of this, we can conclude that even a sinner's money can be used for the purpose of God.

Jochebed didn't receive her wages in silver and gold, but in the same currency which she gave, and that was life.

She gave of herself, and the only adequate payment can be found in the results of the life of her child. She couldn't have been satisfied with anything less than for what she had worked and prayed.

Her son was in the best possible position for a good education and power, but it would all be for nothing if he weren't committed to God.

Jochebed received her wages when the test came in the life of Moses to choose the pleasure and treasures of Egypt, or to choose to be afflicted with the children of God.

Moses chose to go with God's people, and in this was her riches.

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Conclusion

Only a mother's children can pay her the wages she desires. All other gifts, without the gift of a child's love, are futile and inadequate.

One of the greatest historical examples is that of a brilliant teacher of Rhetoric who was rebellious at his mother's religion.

Monica prayed and grieved over the sinful life of her son, but the day came when she received a hundred-fold in wages.

Her son Augustine not only became a Christian, but he dedicated his life and ability to the extent that he became recognized as the greatest influence in the church since the Apostle Paul.

And he has continued to influence the church right up to the present day.

This is a mother's greatest wage, if she's a wise mother doing the work God has ordained for her to do. A mother's greatest wage isn't what her children give her, but what her children become.

May God challenge every mother to live up to this ideal: *“The magic words of our language are Jesus, home, and mother. But until the stars are old, and the sun grows cold, and the leaves of the judgment book unfold, no one will ever know the full measure of service the mothers of earth have constantly, faithfully, and lovingly rendered to their children.”*

A hundred years from now it won't matter what you fed your family, or what you made them wear, but for all eternity it will matter that you were a mother of faith.

The greatest thing any child can do for their mother is to be the answer to her life's labor, love, and prayers by being that person she prayed you would be.

There is no higher honor for a mother than to have children who trust in Jesus and give their life in service to Him. By so doing, you make your mother a great mother.