

Faith . . . and a Wicker Basket

Exodus 2:1-10

Introduction – Setting the Stage

We began, in our last discussion, a journey through the book of Exodus. Turn to chapter 1 of that book.

Egypt at the time of Moses' birth

Moses was born at a time that could be characterized as the darkest era in Hebrew history. The Egyptian Pharaoh has just decreed that all of the Hebrew male children would be cast into the Nile river as an act of religious duty to the great god, the Nile. This was not considered murder; this was justified in their minds as being something that would give allegiance to their god by a people who had ignored their god.

Pharaoh's edict preceding Moses' birth

In verse 22, we are told,

. . . Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive."

The birth of a Hebrew child would normally bring about great celebration and rejoicing. The news would be spread near and far of a Hebrew boy that they had been given in their family. They would have the joy of another son of Abraham who would help the line that would ultimately, bring about the Messiah.

Now, however, in this era, when a Hebrew boy was born, there was terror and fear and the thought of loss. The birth was kept secret in hopes that the Egyptian prowlers and the spies among the Hebrews

themselves would not discover that the baby was a little boy and kill him.

It is in this chapter, when it seems that oppression is at its worst and Pharaoh has issued an extermination edict that God is beginning His plan of emancipation.

Acts of Faith on the Part of Moses' Parents

We begin chapter 2 as God's plan to free the Hebrews from Pharaoh's oppression begins to unfold. Look at verse 1.

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi.

This story is written by Moses and he begins with his own birth. Verse 1 implies that he is the firstborn, which he is not. We will learn later in this book that there were two other children born to this couple. There was a daughter, Miriam, who was perhaps, seven or eight years old during this episode in chapter 2. There was also an older son, Aaron, who was three years older than Moses. They are unnamed in this chapter and in fact, the story seems to indicate that Moses came along first. We know by comparing scripture that he did not.

Concealing Moses

Continue to verse 2, which gives news that would usually bring rejoicing, but now brings fear.

The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months.

We need to take this verse apart in order to understand the context of what is happening. Acts, chapter 7, will tell us that she and her husband saw that he was beautiful. They were people of faith and in fact, conspired together to hide the child.

The word “beautiful” would indicate this couple decided that because their baby boy was so handsome, they would allow him to live. That seems a little inconsistent simply because every parent considers their baby boy to be handsome, even though you and I know that is not true, right? At least that was true for my wife and I, but I do not know about you! Well, their decision was not just because they thought, “Oh, this is such a pretty boy that we don’t want to cast him into the Nile.”

Acts, chapter 7, verse 20, says,

... he was lovely in the sight of God . . .

Now while the text does not give us any inclination of what happened, we know that they had faith because Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 23, says,

By faith Moses, . . . was hidden . . .

As Romans, chapter 10, verse 17, tells us,

... faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

So we can only assume that somehow in this birthing room as they viewed their newborn baby boy, God gave them some sort of revelation that this boy had a destiny. “He is beautiful to Me,” God taught them. He would, in fact, become the redeemer of Israel.

Now note, also in Acts, chapter 7, the story of Moses striking down an Egyptian soldier. You may remember the story. The Egyptian is beating one of the Hebrews and Moses comes along and decides this is the time to implement the rebellion. So he strikes that Egyptian down. However, the text tells us, in verse 25,

... he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand.

The Hebrews rejected Moses; they did not understand that he was the redeemer.

Where did Moses get the idea that he was the redeemer of the Hebrews? Did it come to him in the night? No, it probably came from a mother and father who told him as a little boy, “God has a destiny for you. You will lead the people out.”

In Genesis, chapter 15, verse 13,

God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs [Egypt], where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.

At Moses’ birth, it had been three hundred fifty years. It all fit. Moses was the boy who would grow up to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt.

Moses’ parents, Amram and Jochebed, from some kind of revelation, learned God’s plan for him. So they decided by faith that because he was beautiful unto God, they would hide him. Exodus, chapter 2, verse 2b, says specifically,

... she hid him for three months.

I have to scratch my head over this because I cannot imagine concealing a baby boy for three months. It is hard to conceal a baby for three hours, so I cannot imagine trying to do it for three months.

Now perhaps they put him off or, if they had the tradition that I am sure they did not, maybe they dressed him in pink and told everyone that the baby was a little girl. I do not know what they did, but in some way perhaps, they passed him off to others as a girl.

My wife and I had twin boys during my last semester of seminary. They were fraternal and looked rather different. One of the boys had very fine features – long lashes at birth and a beautiful little face. Of course, that is my bias, you understand. We would be pushing them along in the mall and someone would come up and say, “Oh my, twins! Aren’t they beautiful! Let’s see – this must be the boy, and isn’t that a sweet little girl?”

I found that so irritating. If you do not know the sex of the baby, never guess. If it is a boy and you say that it is a girl, then the dad is going to be worried. If it is a girl and you say, “Oh, what a handsome boy,” the Mom is going to be worried.

Well, I do not know how Moses’ parents did it, but somehow they concealed him; somehow they fooled everyone for three months. Perhaps they dug an underground room or put a loft in their hut and somehow kept him quiet, or as quiet as they could. I cannot imagine.

Exposing Moses

At the end of three months, the text tells us, in verse 3, that,

... she could hide him no longer . . .

So, she comes up with a plan. I think Amram probably designed the little boat. It says,

. . . she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. . . .

Pitch would be bitumen – a plant they believed would repel the crocodile. The vessels were usually coated with bitumen because the Nile was infested by the servants of the Nile god – the crocodiles. So Jochebed put this boat together, while Amram worked in the field, and made it as water tight as she could possibly make it.

Verse 3 continues and tells us,

. . . Then she put the child into it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile.

You should underline in your text the word “set”. You may have the idea that this is an act of sheer foolishness. You may think she just puts the little boat into the water and says, “God help you. I’m going to trust God for this and I’ll let Him take care of all of the details.”

No. Jochebed took every possible precaution to make sure that this boy would survive.

We often learn from archaeologists and one thing that we have learned is that the daughters of the Pharaohs often had their own housing and it would usually be by the Nile. The reason for that is because the Nile was considered a fertility giver. That is also the reason that the Egyptians would often sacrifice children to the Nile – they were in hopes that the Nile god would give them many more. What happens next is best understood in this context.

Let us take note of verse 4 before we get too far. Moses’ sister Miriam is about seven years old at this time.

His sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him.

Verse 5 tells us what happened. We know, by the way, that the Pharaoh’s daughter’s name was Merri.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile . . .

This was not a bath in which she took a bar of soap, decided she needed to be clean, and headed down to the Nile. Being the daughter of Pharaoh, she would have marble encased baths; she would have the most luxurious surroundings and attendants to bathe her as well. This bath in the Nile was a religious ritual.

If the archaeologist’s chronology is correct, this woman was yet childless and believed, as all Egyptians believed, that if she bathed ritualistically in the Nile, the waters of their fertility god would give her many children. So she is not bathing herself to get clean, but is in hopes that the god would be favorable to her and give her a child.

It is interesting that there is only one person in all of the kingdom who could override the edict of the Pharaoh and save Moses’ life, and that one person is the daughter of Pharaoh. Do not think for a moment that Amram and Jochebed did not know that. Do not think for a moment that they did not realize she was without child and would be very sympathetic perhaps, to having a child. This is faith in action that combines all that they could do to help their boy survive.

The text tells us that Jochebed,

. . . set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile.

She carefully picked the spot and placed the basket where she knew Pharaoh’s daughter would come down to take this ritual bath. It is there that Pharaoh’s daughter notices the little basket. Look at verse 5b.

. . . and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it to her.

Continue to verse 6. This is where J. Vernon McGee said that God pitched Moses.

When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the boy was crying. . . .

I do not think this was the kind of cry that irritates, I think it was the little whimper that brings sympathy. My daughter has it mastered. It does not affect her mother, but it really gets me. It is that little whimper that you just cannot turn away from.

I think, as Pharaoh’s daughter lifted the lid on that little boat, Moses whimpered and began to cry. Perhaps he blinked his eyes at the sun that was now full force in his face. At that moment, God brought together a baby’s cry and a woman’s heart, and Pharaoh’s daughter found Moses, who was, as verse 6 tells us, obviously a Hebrew child, irresistible.

Now extra-biblical texts suggest that at that moment, she began thinking, with her maidens, “Who can nurse this boy?”

So Pharaoh’s daughter and her maidens went around the circle trying to decide who could take care of this boy and nurse him. They could not find

anyone, so it was at that moment that “plan A” went into action. Notice what happened in verse 7.

Then his sister [Miriam] 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?”

Now again, do not think that this whole story rests upon the ingenuity of a eight year old child, who came up with the clever thought, when this whole thing began to develop, “Oh, I know, I’ll suggest that I get a Hebrew maid and I’ll go home and get Mom.”

Absolutely not. They had this thing planned to the most minute detail. Miriam was sent along to watch and she was instructed that, if Pharaoh’s daughter did not cast the baby into the water of the Nile, but instead seemed sympathetic, to wait until just the right time and dash over and say, “Can I get a maid for you?” – and she had her lines memorized.

I can imagine Jochebed, back at the hut, hoping that Miriam remembered her lines and said them just right. I love watching the faces of parents when children are in a play or are singing before a group and they have a solo part. Mom and Dad do not enjoy it a bit. You can watch their faces and tell.

I was reading recently, of a little boy who was in a Sunday school play. He got on stage and saw the crowd and forgot his lines. His mother was sitting on the front row, so she begins to gesture wildly and mouth the words, “I am the Light of the world. I am the Light of the world.” Finally, with great confidence, the boy said, “My mother is the light of the world.”

I have a feeling that Jochebed and Miriam had planned, and rehearsed, and rehearsed again. Jochebed would say, “Now Miriam, what are you going to say? Here are the words, ‘Shall I call for you a maid from among the Hebrews to nurse this child?’” What a plan.

Now understand before we go any further that up to this point, all of the characters in this play are nameless. We will not learn the names of Moses’ dad, mom, and sister until later. We will never learn, other than through extra-biblical resources, the name of Pharaoh’s daughter. It has been suggested, and I would agree, that the point that God is giving to us as He made this account into scripture, is that He is the primary actor; He is in total control. I do not think He wants the focus of the spotlight on anything other than His plan; His sovereign decree.

As we watch these events develop, we may get the idea, “Wasn’t Jochebed clever? Wasn’t Miriam really sharp? Wasn’t it something the way they were able to persuade Pharaoh . . .”

No, none of that. God is at work. Around that little basket floating in the reeds of the Nile, is the shield of God’s purpose. Even in the height of pain and difficulty, God had a plan. It would be eighty years before it was developed. Most people would wonder if God was alive. Yet, God was at work.

That same shield is around every one of our lives. It is the shield of God’s divine plan and purpose.

I think perhaps, the fact that these people are left unnamed is best understood through the words on the monument of John Wesley. Wesley was a man who was greatly used of God. On his tombstone monument in Westminster Abbey, he had inscribed these words, “God buries the workman, and carries on His work.”

Let us not come away from this study with our eyes tuned on people, but on a sovereign God.

Acts of Providence on the Part of Moses’ God

Now note what happens next.

Merri (Pharaoh’s daughter) adopts and protects Moses

We will start with verses 6 and 7.

When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the boy was crying. And she had pity 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?”

Do not think for a moment that Pharaoh’s daughter did not get the plot. She knew. Continue to verse 8.

Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Go ahead.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother.

I imagine that Jochebed gave it away when she came up to the bank of the Nile and with trembling hands reached out to get her son back. They knew what was going on. But somehow, God had moved in the heart of Pharaoh’s daughter to accept it and to

override the edict of her cruel father and to allow this boy to live.

So Jochebed took that little boy home and nursed him, perhaps for a period of three to four years. She kept him until he was fully trained.

God used the daughter of a Pharaoh to adopt the child and to protect the child.

Merri (Pharaoh's daughter) educates Moses

Let us look at what happens next. Begin with verse 9a.

Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give you your wages." . . .

Imagine that, moms – being paid for raising your children! Wouldn't that be wonderful? Continue to verses 9b through 10a.

. . . So the woman took the child and nursed him. The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter . . .

Note that she kept her word. Pharaoh's daughter did not have to send a legion of soldiers to get that baby boy.

This, in fact, was another great act of faith on the part of Jochebed. She was entrusting the life of her son, not understanding how it would all work out, but she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter.

Can you imagine that? Jochebed perhaps, kneeling in reverence to the daughter of Pharaoh and holding her baby boy up, unable to give full vent to the plot and tell her, "This is my son. Please, may I keep him?"

She gave him to Pharaoh's daughter. What faith; what trust.

Look at verse 10a.

The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. And she named him Moses, . . .

Did you get that? Pharaoh's daughter was the one who gave him the name "Mosheh". "Mo" means "son," and "sheh" means "to draw out". She says, in verse 10b,

. . . "Because I drew him out of the water."

Perhaps he was not named as a part of the plot. If they had given him a boy's name, they may have slipped and given away the secret that this was a boy.

So, no name had been given. Pharaoh's daughter would give him a name.

Application – Their Faith and Ours

Now, let us draw the strings together and let me give you, by way of application, three things about faith, as evidenced in their lives.

Faith benefits those who live closest to us

1. First, faith benefits those who live closest to us.

Let me tell you what I mean by that. There were several benefits that were a result of the faith of Amram and Jochebed.

One was that Jochebed was now able to stay home and raise her children. Because of the edict, parents had been forced out of the home to labor camps. The children perhaps, tagged along with them in the field as they worked, and may have been forced to work themselves. But because of this act of faith, she was given the great benefit of being able to stay home and raise her children.

Ladies and gentlemen, I really believe that in this century, it is going to take more and more of a declaration of faith for moms to remain at home. In 1950, only twelve percent of mothers were at work outside the home. In 1987, that figure had risen to fifty percent. In the next five years, that figure is expected to rise to eighty percent.

The tragic tale of that statistic is that now, more than ten million children are being raised by someone else. *Ten million* children! My heart grieves for ten million children.

Now I recognize that there are instances where a mom must work outside the home. My heart, in sympathy, goes out to every single mom who has the burden of raising her children and providing for them. However, my heart has little sympathy and I do not think it is appropriate when a man and a woman decide volitionally, for the sake of social advancement, for the sake of purchasing things, that they will give their child to someone else. God help us.

There is a feminist lie that tells the women of today, and our young people, that for a woman to be fulfilled, there must be a career outside the home. I cannot help but think that because of her faith,

Jochebed was able to take Moses and raise him and train him.

The interesting thing in this text is that there is no mention of Amram even being in the home. Perhaps he was in a labor camp and was working in the fields. God, in a sense, is emphasizing the fact that nothing can replace the need of a mother.

Where did Moses learn the covenant given to his forefather Abraham? Where did he get the idea that he was the redeemer? Where did he learn such truths that one day he would forsake Egypt for a people he barely knew? How? Why?

I believe in the early days in his home, his mother instructed him and trained him and taught him. Not only Moses, but she taught Aaron and his sister Miriam, who together with Moses, would be instrumental in leading the people out of Egypt.

There may be instances where work is necessary. In fact, I come from a home where my mother had to work. It was their conviction that all of their boys, my three brothers and I, attend a Christian school. On a missionary salary, however, it was impossible to send us all. So when the fourth, my youngest brother, enrolled in kindergarten, my mother began working.

My mother chose to work at the school that we attended, as one of the maids. I am deeply grateful for that. I was never embarrassed in any way that she was a maid. In fact, by that time, I was in fifth grade and really had the inside scoop. Just before gym class, when all of the other guys were scrounging around for a fresh pair of socks and the gym clothes that we had to wear, I would slip down to the maid's room and my mother would give me a fresh pair right out of the dryer. Man, I was the envy of that class! I appreciate my parent's conviction too.

However, ladies and gentlemen, it is time that someone has the guts to stand up and it must be you. The sweep of our culture is tearing the family apart and it is telling us a message that to really be happy, we must have things. It may be a house or a car or clothing. I challenge you to examine your motivation if you are a working mom with children who are not yet out of school.

Faith affects decisions that surround us

2. A second point about faith that strikes me from this passage, is that faith affects decisions that surround us, or it should.

I come away from this passage with questions. Does my faith in God demand honesty and integrity? Does my faith in God shape my vocabulary? Does my faith, does your faith in God keep you in the front seat on a date? Does your faith in God guide your hand as you fill out an expense report? Does your faith in God work? Is your faith in God alive?

George Gallop, Jr. wrote these words that have struck my heart, "Never before in the history of America, has Christianity gained such popularity and made so many inroads, while at the same time, making so little difference."

Why? It is because the faith that we claim to have, does not impact our lives.

Amram and Jochebed made a strategic decision. In housing a Hebrew boy, they could have lost their lives. Their conviction, however, declared that they would obey God. And their child would live. Their decisions were shaped on the basis of faith.

Faith impacts people who are observing us

3. Let me give one more point about faith and that is, faith impacts people who are observing us.

You have no idea – on the job, in the neighborhood – who is watching you. Perhaps you have not realized that someone is keeping their eye on you and is noticing that there is something different about you. You make them thirsty for something and they do not know what. You are a source of conviction and they cannot understand why. It is your faith in God that is alive.

One of the greatest parts of this story is what would happen some fifty years later. We have learned that the daughter of Pharaoh was named Merri. There have been discoveries of appellations with the Pharaoh's daughter's name being found and discovered at this time. We know, from rabbinical traditions and stories carried down through the Hebrews, who honored this woman and kept her story alive, that her name was changed to Bithia. Bithia means, "daughter of Jehovah."

Something occurred with Merri, or Bithia, and the text does not really tell us. We wish we had all of the details, but at some point, she decided, along with her son Moses, that she would no longer be the daughter of Pharaoh. Instead, she would become the daughter of Jehovah, or Yahweh.

There is a very rare passage of scripture that is often overlooked. Turn to I Chronicles, chapter 4, and look at verse 17 to see it for yourself. Hold on to your hat when you see the implication involved.

And the sons of Ezra [Hebrews who came out of the Exodus] were Jether, Mered, Epher, and Jalon. (And these are the sons of Bithia the daughter of Pharaoh, whom Mered took) . . .

Did you catch that? The daughter of Pharaoh left during the Exodus with the people of Israel. She took a Hebrew husband and bore children. She had turned her back on her home country. Her faith had been brought alive by the faith of those that she had seen and observed.

It is interesting, as a sidelight, that she bears a firstborn daughter. Continue in verse 17 and notice what she names her.

. . . and she conceived and bore Miriam . . .

What a day that must have been as the people of Israel exited Egypt, and among them, we already know, were many Egyptians who had become proselytes of God. In that company was a woman who was none other than the daughter of Pharaoh.

Why? How did that happen? She had observed, in the life of these Hebrew children, a faith in God that would not break them; a faith that would allow her adopted son to turn his back and perhaps, in lengthy discussions with her, explain, "I must follow God." So she said, "I've got to have that," and became a follower of Jehovah as well.

My dear friend, does your faith benefit those who live closest to you? Does your faith affect decisions that you make; your lifestyle? Does your faith impact those who are observing you? Is your faith alive?

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 7/30/1989 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 1989 Stephen Davey

All rights reserved.