

## **Jochebed**

Jochebed to me, seems to have been one of the most spirit-led women in all of Scripture. While little is mentioned about her, there is much that we can infer without doing any violence to God's Word. She was the wife of Amram, whose father was Kohath, and he was the second son of Levi, who was the third of the twelve sons of Jacob. Levi lived to age 137, (Genesis 6:36) which would have been about 1619 BC, and died about 16 years after Joseph died. Joseph died at age 110, in 1635 BC. Interestingly from the modern perspective, Jochebed was also her husband's Amram's aunt, in that she was one of Levi's, daughters, and was therefore Amram's father's sister (Exodus 6:20). From this we might conclude that she was older than her husband, but Kohath lived to be 133 years old, and so Jochebed could easily have been born many years after Amram. Thus the genealogy of Moses starting with Jacob as his great, great grandfather, goes to Levi his great grandfather, to Kohath his grandfather to Amram and Jochebed, his parents.

What makes Jochebed a woman of remarkable stature is the manner in which we are told she cared for her third child, and the quality of godly mothering she must have given to all three. Jochebed and Amram were the parents of Miriam, Aaron and Moses, all three of whom are notable characters in Scripture whom God used to His glory. Moses was probably about three months old when she put him in a basket and placed him on the Nile River. We all know the story of how Pharaoh's daughter found him among the bulrushes and took him for her own. However, do we fully appreciate Jochebed's courage that caused her to violate the decree, and the role this spirit-blessed mother played, as God led her through those fateful years, as she mothered these children under the stifling burden of the prevailing social structure? At the time of Moses birth, Miriam was about ten years old and Aaron was three.

Scripture tells us that Pharaoh had ordered all male babies killed at birth in order to control the slave population. Perhaps this may have been a relatively new edict, because Aaron was already three years old at the time of Moses' birth, and there is no evidence that he had been hidden away, nor is it likely that he could have been, without divine

protection, given the close surveillance the Egyptians were likely to have imposed regarding this decree. The fact that Jochebed could have kept Moses hidden for three months, in itself speaks of divine intervention. Before we go further into the details surrounding Jochebed's service to God as it relates to Moses, let us delve a little more into the situation the preceded Moses' birth and also what has been recorded about his first forty years while he was a "prince of Egypt."

Flavius Josephus, the great first century historian added a great deal of flavor and details to this period. In his epic work "The antiquities of the Jews," his account is quite consistent with what we find in Exodus 2. However he seems to also have had other historical information from which we might find some that can add a little more flesh to the bones of the biblical story, information which I don't believe causes any disrespect or departure from God's Narrative. We'll get to that in a moment,

What could have been the background that allowed the later generations of Jacob and his twelve sons, to become a million or more slaves? At the Pharaoh's invitation, Jacob's family, this group of seventy souls settled in the fertile lands of Goshen, which is in the northern part of Egypt. This was with the Pharaoh's blessing, because of Joseph's great service to him. That was about 1706 BC. There they seem to have prospered and multiplied greatly. However, according to Josephus, the Egyptians, in the meantime, "grew delicate and lazy...and gave themselves up to pleasures and in particular to the love of gain." Remember, that Joseph had led the Egyptian nation into great prosperity due to his wise and prudent management of the Pharaoh's affairs. This then, in a way, set up this decadence-causing prosperity and leisure. However, the Israelites, due to a strong work ethic and rich grazing land, prospered even more greatly, and thereby became the envy of the Egyptians who then may have grown to covet what they had. Nevertheless, they must have had freedom to so prosper for at least the seventy-one years that Joseph lived after they settled in Goshen.

Acts 7:18 tells us that a Pharaoh "who knew not Joseph," came to power sometime after Joseph died. It seems likely this was the Assyrian of Isaiah 52:4 "who oppressed them

without cause”. It was envy and resentment of their continuing prosperity, as well as fear of their growing population, that seems to have become a threat to the governmental structure that brought about the ensuing difficulties for the Israelites. If the Pharaoh was indeed the Assyrian, then his ruling group was very likely a minority within the whole Egyptian population. It’s only logical that, for his own survival, the new Pharaoh would have viewed this large population of aliens as being a serious problem that needed drastic action.

We may also conclude, as is later quite evident, that throughout their sojourn in Egypt, the Israelites would have adopted many of the Egyptian customs and religions as well as their gods. I’m persuaded that their years of slavery may have been the first installment of their accepting other gods. It’s likely also, that most of the population would have had handed down to them some memories and stories about the Covenant yet as usual, these were in the hearts of only a small remnant. While I’m persuaded that God’s written Word had somehow been preserved, in “draft form” and was always in some elders possession, it was most likely well hidden by that remnant for its safety, as it was passed down through the generations, perhaps to Aaron, and then to Moses. That doesn’t mean that God didn’t edit every word and phrase in accordance with His perfect purpose.

Also it is evident that their slavery was considerably different from what most of us seem to imagine, when we think of that condition. It is clear from Exodus 9 that they owned some cattle during this period. It is also clear that they did not lose all of their governmental sovereignty because we know that from Genesis 49: 10 “*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come...*” There was some amount of personal and tribal ownership, as well as self governance remained throughout this “slavery” period. Taking these things into consideration, perhaps we may conclude that the “slavery” was more in the nature of a military type “draft” of all or most of the able-bodied men into some form of strict servitude. This would probably have left many of the women children and elderly “at home” and relatively unaffected, and able to retain some of their economic cultural and political structure.

Another reason for the added burden placed on them shortly before Moses was born, according to Josephus, was a prophecy expressed to the Pharaoh by his Satan controlled priests and soothsayers. According to Josephus, they foretold that a child would be born of the slaves who, if he were allowed to live, would “bring the Egyptians dominion low and would raise the Israelites; he would excel all men in virtue, and obtain a glory that would be remembered throughout the ages.” This, along with Pharaoh’s fear of the growing population is probably the major reason why the Pharaoh commanded that they should cast every male child who was born to the Israelites, into the river so as to kill all of them. I suspect that this fear of their growing population, as mentioned in Exodus 1, may not to have been the strongest reason for this horrible edict! There certainly were more rapid and effective ways for them to have reduced the population, if that was their only purpose. Killing all new-born males seems to have been directed more specifically toward the elimination of the prophesied Israeli “spoiler”, than to shrink the total Hebrew population.

Josephus’ account continues by telling us about Amram having received in a dream, a calling from God to save the baby Moses by sending him down the river in a reed basket or “ark”. This helps explain why, through faith, these blessed parents did this strange thing after three months of keeping him hidden, three months of growth that would make it more certain that he could survive the ordeal if someone were to find him.

Scripture tells us that Miriam was sent to follow the progress of the ark as it floated down stream until by divine providence it lodged in the bulrushes near where the Pharaoh’s daughter chose to bathe each day. We can see here how intricately the Divine hand worked its will in the events that followed. No other explanation is sufficient. It would seem that God had put into Pharaoh’s daughter’s heart a powerful yearning for a baby, which, again through divine purpose, she apparently was unable to have of herself. Then we find another divinely provided miracle, that is, a wholly unlikely softening of Pharaoh’s heart. However, it was probably most strongly softened by love for his daughter, who its likely was is only child. It might also be that there was no man of royal blood available for her to marry. Or perhaps she was a childless widow, or one who had

lost both husband and son. Given his acceptance and grooming of Moses, I believe that it is safe to conclude that Pharaoh had no son to succeed him.

The daughter knew immediately that it was a Hebrew baby, as did Pharaoh, yet he not only allowed her to keep him, but also seems to have given him the full status of a royal son, and potential heir to the throne. Given what Pharaoh probably believed regarding the prophesy, God must have also blinded him regarding the possible connection between the baby and the prophesied “spoiler”. I suppose to greatly aid in the softening and acceptance of the baby, Moses was an especially beautiful child as we learn in Exodus 2:2 where it says “...*he was a goodly child.*” This goodly in Hebrew is “tob” which means “especially beautiful.” Remember this was 80 years before Moses confronted the Pharaoh demanding the liberation of his people. This Pharaoh would have been a son, or grandson, or of a different dynasty. Therefore, the Moses of 40 years earlier may not have even been remembered.

However, according to Josephus, the prophecy continued to be remembered in Pharaoh’s court, and it was believed by the priests that Moses was the fulfillment of that prophecy. Again, however, it appears that God had continued to blind Pharaoh to that fact. Later, when Moses became a man, according to Josephus, there came a period when the Ethiopians began to overrun the country and threatened to bring down the dynasty. Moses was made a general and given the task of turning them back, and in fact he actually conquered and severely decimated the enemy. The priests had hoped that he would be killed, and instead, he returned as a great conquering hero. Apparently however, the intrigues against him grew in intensity because of his great fame, and the gratitude of the people. This can help explain why, after killing the Egyptian who was beating the Israelites slave, he felt it necessary to quickly run off to Midian where he spent the next 40 years. He probably reasoned that this killing revealed his strong sentiment for his kinfolks, and would have given the priests a strong “I told you so” to prove to Pharaoh the validity of their predictions about him. This was just what the ruling authorities needed to finally discredit him with the Pharaoh.

Back again to Jochebed, and to Moses as a baby. We can also see God at work as we see how the Pharaoh's daughter realized she needed a nurse maid, and how it was that Miriam "just happened to be there" to suggest the availability of Jochebed to do the job. Again, without divine intervention, why should she have accepted a Hebrew slave woman over an Egyptian to be the nursemaid, and even pay her for her service? What a divine blessing this must have been for Jochebed. She was now able to continue safely to express her love and motherhood, and to see her son grow strong and educated under the most powerful nation, something far greater in earthly benefits than the very best she could ever have imagined for her son in that slave culture. We know nothing of the ensuing years as to what happened to her as Moses grew into manhood. Yet, we can be certain that she, as well as his siblings, kept close watch over his growth and development, and prayed mightily for him.

Even though he was being trained to be a prince of the Egyptian realm, and even heir apparent to Pharaoh, because of her faith, she must have known that God's great purpose would somehow be served through him. It is apparent that Moses knew of his heritage, that is, that he was a Hebrew, and perhaps from some continued contact with Jochebed and Amram, he also had a good bit of that divinely implanted sense that he was one of those separated by God to be special among His special people. We find this evidenced when at age forty, we see him rescue a Hebrew slave being needlessly punished by the Egyptian overseer, whom Moses killed. Given how he "turned out" it may be that Jochebed was able somehow, by God's grace and purpose, to plant that seed of faith that God later watered and nurtured to such great fruitfulness.

As noted earlier, Josephus tells us about some of Moses exploits as an Egyptian general who fought and conquered, and thus even enlarged Pharaoh's realm. What mixed emotions Jochebed must have had as Moses grew and excelled in the earthly sense. How much personal involvement son and mother may have had at this time and later, is not revealed. Again however, it would be reasonable to believe that God may have rewarded her with some insights into his spiritual specialness and the role he would later play in fulfilling God's purpose. She knew from the beginning that he was very special to God

as evidenced by God's earliest involvement that guided her and Amram to the actions she took after his birth. Just how God prepared her for participation in His plan is in itself miraculous. In order for us to appreciate just how incredible this was, we must consider what has already been described about how the entire Israelite people had been slaves for several generations as their captors had sought to remove every vestige of their former religious beliefs, and to inculcate their own, which for the most part they did quite successfully.

Proof of the slave masters success in "paganizing" them is made quite evident several times in the recordings of Israel's sojourn in wilderness. They were Israelites by bloodline, a fact God made certain to preserve. However, their faith in Him, and the religious traditions that their early fathers had followed, seem to have faded into little more than a misty myth to all but that small remnant of which she was a part. No doubt God's protection and guidance were present, but probably well hidden during those troubled years of slavery. However, here in the hearts of Jochebed and Amram, as well as what we see in these strange events after Moses' birth, we recognize that God was again in revealed action. With the priests' prophecy, probably repeated many times to Pharaoh, how else but by God's intervention could Pharaoh have allowed this Hebrew child to live, let alone grow up as a favored prince in his palace? His daughter desperately wanted a son. How many thousands of choices among the Egyptian babies were available, the adoption of which might have precluded fulfillment of the prophecy? Pharaoh deliberately allowed this one and only child to live, this one that actually fulfilled the prophecy. Of course, the fulfillment came eighty years later, long after those concerned were gone.

Given what might have been the people's dual faith, that is acknowledgment of the God of their fathers, along with pagan idol worship that seems to have prevailed among the Israelites, we may be sure, as God has always saw fit to provide, there was a small group of the truly faithful within the multitude. Just what form of faith, what intrinsic quality of faith, could have remained in the hearts of this remnant is difficult to know. However, it surely was a godly faith in the hearts of Jochebed and Amram as evidenced by what they

did, and the three very gifted of God's disciples that they provided. We see God inspired qualities in all three children. Remember that both Miriam and Aaron accompanied Moses and the Israelite nation to Mt. Sinai, and into the wilderness. We know that God prepared Aaron to be Moses' assistant in his dealings with Pharaoh, and Miriam suddenly appeared in Scripture as a prophetess after the Red Sea crossing. She remained unnamed until the event, which is recorded in Exodus 15:20 where it says "*and Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron...*"

Later in Numbers 12, we find both Aaron and Miriam speaking out to the Lord against their younger brother, challenging his qualifications to receive the authority God had given him over His people. They cited the fact that Moses had married an Ethiopian, a Cushite as evidence. Their concern, if it was, indeed unbiased, probably was based on their limited understanding of how or why God instructed their earliest fathers to take wives from within their blood line. However there are recorded several God-permitted exceptions such as the wives of Judah and Joseph, as well as numerous others.

Here, God had already chosen Moses, and so they were in effect challenging God's choice as if He didn't know of Moses' Ethiopian wife. To have so married was, of course, neither morally or legally wrong at that time. God straightened them out quickly and punished Miriam with leprosy. Aaron seeing the truth of their sin quickly repented and then appealed to Moses on her behalf. God healed her after 7 days. As a prophetess, it appears that God may have used Miriam over the years for His purposes. Now He had reunited these three for His use, which no doubt was more extensive than that about which we have been given knowledge.

Although these "children," Miriam age 92, and Aaron age 85 at the time, had erred in challenging God' choice, we can see that Jochebed and Amram had raised them in the spirit of the Lord in some manner far different than the Israelite population in general had received. This also attests to God's great blessing of these parents for them to have done so in an idolatrous slave environment.



The issue of Moses' Ethiopian wife seems to have went back to an event not mentioned in Scripture, but noted by Josephus. After having chased the Ethiopians back to their own land, General Moses laid siege to their last stronghold, a seemingly impregnable walled city "between two waters." As Josephus describes it, Moses appeared day after day directing the preparation for the siege, while the king's daughter watched him from the ramparts, and presumably fell in love with him. She proposed marriage, and told him that if he would swear to marry her, she would open the gates. He did, she did, and so the conquest was complete and they were married. Was it love, or was it a clever woman recognizing an inevitable defeat, negotiating for herself the best deal available? Perhaps it was a little of both. Presumably, he brought her back to Egypt as his wife as he had promised. It's doubtful that he loved her. I suspect that for him, it was a war-time expediency that he knew could save many lives. He must have left her when he ran alone into the wilderness.

Later he married a daughter of a Midian priest. This was not the Ethiopian, as many commentators have assumed. The Midian priest, named Jethro, also called Ruel or Raguel, was a descendant of Abraham by his second wife Keturah. Therefore his daughter, the one Scripture tells us that Moses married, could not have been the one Aaron and Miriam had referred to. From this we can see that his siblings were no strangers to Moses career during his stay in Egypt. For some reason they seem to have held this against him all those ensuing forty years. My sense is that this was not a racial issue as many have assumed. Instead, it was a matter of ethnicity and the long recognized Godly mandate that the sons of Israel should take wives from within their own people group, that is the Shemites. Assuming that they understood the circumstances of Moses' marriage to the Ethiopian princess, they found it unacceptable, and a permanent stigma on his character.

As so often seems to happen, when I'm persuaded to write on some particular topic, I tend to complicate my efforts by discovering and allowing myself to drift into peripheral issues such as this non- biblically reported aspect of Moses' life. These discoveries are too compelling to leave alone, or to save for another time. It was my thoughts of

Jochebed and how bravely and perseveringly she served our Lord when He called her into His service that first motivated this study, not the early life of Moses. To me, she was without a doubt one of the great “unsung” heroines of the Old Testament, and so I wanted in some way, to bring attention to the significant part she played in “God’s grand plan for His people. This led to the need to set forth the background conditions preceding and succeeding her brief hour on the stage of history. Then followed the need to correct a mistake that many competent Bible scholars, even Josephus, have made as to the duration of the Israelites slavery.

Now it seems appropriate to correct this misinterpretation of when slavery began within the mentioned 430 years from when Abraham first “sojourned” in lands ruled by others. This 430 years was not a full period of slavery, or any other kind of servitude. Simple reference to the readily available and dependable chronology of the time as shown here, establishes this quite clearly.

A surprising number of scholars claim that they were in slavery for 400 of those years. We have already shown this to be false. The 400 years is the amount of time that, they (the pagan tribes) “*shall afflict them four hundred years*” (Genesis 15:13. Afflict in the Hebrew is “*anab*” which means “to look down, browbeat, depress,” etc. Also it is the same time that they “entreated them evil”. (Acts 7:6) “Evil, as used here is from the Greek work “*kakoo*”, meaning to “injure, exasperate, make evil, harm, hurt, vex”. That was not slavery. However, their period of slavery was within that 400 years. This “afflicting or “entreating them evil” began when Ishmael “mocked” Isaac during the celebration of Isaac’s weaning, 30 years after Abraham crossed into Canaan. (Gen 21:9) From then on, there were various forms of discrimination, exclusion, harassment etc. These took place many years prior to their migration into Egypt and this subsequent enslavement. (Remember how the Philistines, in Genesis 26, stopped Abraham’s wells, and then later, stopped several of Isaac’s wells)

It was exactly 430 years to the day, from the day Abram entered Canaan, until Moses led the people across the Red Sea and out of Egypt (Exodus 12:41). The fact is that the

Israelites were enslaved a maximum of 144 years! This is evidenced in Scripture which makes it clear that there was no slavery until after Joseph died and a “Pharaoh who knew not Joseph came to power.” Joseph died in 1635 BC and Moses was born 64 years later in 1571 BC. Add the 80 years to when Moses led the people, and we find that the very longest that slavery could possibly have existed was  $64 + 80 = 144$  years, even if it began the same year Joseph died, which is quite unlikely.

The second “tangential drift” away from Jochebed that I have been persuaded to report on, had to do with that first forty years of Moses’ life, and his impressive exploits. While most of this part of his life, is not from Scripture, and therefore cannot be taken as inerrant truth, I believe that it is most likely quite factual, probably having been derived from handed down oral history and/or other historical writing, the substance of which God deemed not pertinent for His purposes. They are therefore excluded from “His Book.” Nevertheless, He may have allowed these details to survive, and through Josephus, to enhance our knowledge and appreciation of his great servant Moses. How blessed we are that He has allowed us to view so many details of His incredible plan for our redemption, which after all, is the principal purpose of His Holy Word.

Note that neither Jochebed nor Amram are even mentioned by name where their calling and her blessed efforts are recorded in Exodus 2. It wasn’t until Exodus 6:20 where the genealogy of Levi is recorded, do we find their names mentioned. We must wait until Numbers 26:59 to discover that they were the parents of Miriam, Aaron and Moses. These are the only places in Scripture where Jochebed’s name is mentioned. Nevertheless, God did memorialize her by naming her in the genealogy of Levi. This is an honor bestowed very rarely to women. Her name also has particular uniqueness, as it means “Jehovah is her, or our glory.” Here we find that she was the very first person in Scripture, to have a name compounded with Jehovah. How subtly and sweetly does our Lord God bestow honor to His most faithful servants!