

Jochebed And The Hebrew Midwives— Women Facing Crisis And Danger

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Courage and conviction are requisites for everyone who attempts to serve God faithfully. For this reason the Biblical record is filled with accounts of individuals who possessed these qualities and are admired as mighty heroes of faith. Women are just as fearless and devoted as any man when it comes to serving the true and living God. In Exodus chapters one and two we read of three such women: Shiphrah, Puah and Jochebed. The latter was the mother of Moses, while the first two were Hebrew midwives (Exodus 1:15; 2:20). They lived in Egypt at a time of crisis and danger for all of Israel's children--God's chosen people.

Chapter one informs us that a new king sat upon the throne of Egypt that did not know Joseph (nor did he know God) who began to suspicion that the growing number of Hebrews was a possible threat to his nation's security (Exodus 1:8-10). To solve this perceived problem he resorted to cruelty and oppression of the Jewish people hoping to beat them down and curtail their population (v. 11). Pharaoh afflicted the Hebrew nation with hard bondage forcing them to build cities for the Egyptians. However, the more severely the Egyptians treated the Jews, the greater the population grew (vs. 12-14). Instead of controlling this threat to his nation's security, the problem for the Egyptians only became more pronounced and this was even more troubling.

Pharaoh callously (in Adolf Hitler style) decided that to kill all male children born to the Hebrews would solve his problem with the Jews. So he summoned the Hebrew midwives and ordered them to destroy the male children, but female children were permitted to live. Jochebed, though not a midwife, lived under these same orders. Because of the decree of Pharaoh her son was subject to be killed too. But not one of these Hebrew women intended to follow through with Pharaoh's wicked plan and that is what made them spiritual heroines. They refused to be baby killers and they refused to be disobedient to God. Hooray for these women who had the courage to resist one of the most powerful men in the world at that time and say, "no," we are not committing an immoral act though the orders have come from the highest earthly office. We admire these women for making this solid stand, particularly before Pharaoh.

They obeyed God rather than man. Pharaoh was the leader of a then world super power. He may have been the most powerful ruler in the world at that time. But despite all of his power, he was also a very wicked man. The women were not overly impressed with the power of the king, not when compared with the power of Almighty God. Give credit to these women of courage because the Bible says, "And the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive" (Exodus 1:17). They were of the same mindset as the apostles who told a threatening crowd of ungodly men, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

God must come first and wicked rulers must come last (Matthew 6:33; 10:28). These women could have lost their lives for refusing to comply with the king's orders, but more important to them than their lives was their obedience to God. The Creator of the universe will not occupy second place in the heart of man and these women understood that. If it takes great courage to keep God first in our hearts, then we must rise to the occasion. When their faith was challenged, they chose to serve God (Joshua 24:15). Pharaoh could kill them for their rebellion if he wanted to, but their

obedience to the Lord never compromised. This is the way it must be for Christians today. Revelation 2:10 says, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried: and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Every generation of God-fearing people faces their own challenges. Noah's family lived among an extremely wicked society. Surely there were dangers involved in living in the midst of people whose every thought was only evil continually (Genesis 6:5). Still, Noah and his family completely obeyed the commands of God (Genesis 7:5). Daniel valiantly faced the danger of the lion's den; and young David defeated a giant who frightened everyone else (Daniel 6; 1 Samuel 17). Elijah, Micaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and a host of other prophets successfully delivered blistering messages to audiences filled with ungodly people. Their audiences responded with threats and ill treatment toward these valiant men, but they kept on preaching exactly what God told them to say. Many years after the Old Testament prophets left earth's scene the church experienced many years of painful persecutions, and despite the adversity continued living godly lives. Though circumstances vary, each servant of the Lord must maintain that same brand of courage. Today we have our own battles to fight.

They were rewarded by God for their faithfulness. No faithful service to the Lord goes without a reward. The Bible says that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). These courageous women sought to do the will of the Lord and in return, they received their due. The midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, "...feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive" (Exodus 1:17). Thus, "...God dealt well with the midwives..." (Exodus 1:20). We see that the Lord noticed the courage and faithfulness of these women. The text also says, "And it came to pass because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses" (v.21). We must learn that it pays to serve the Lord (read Deuteronomy 28:1-15).

Jochebed and her husband refused to slay their son and hence God blessed them as well. It seems that God's providential blessing was that their son (a Jewish male baby) was taken to the home of Pharaoh--the very person who issued the command to kill all male Hebrew babies. How ironic that it was there he was protected, nurtured and grew to the maturity of a man. What a blessing that his very own mother was chosen to be his nurse (Exodus 2:5-10). Instead of losing her son, she was able to be with him constantly as his nurse. It was Moses that God would send to Pharaoh and demand that the Hebrews be released to freedom. This was their earthly reward for being obedient. Man is not made poorer by serving the Master, he is made rich.

No good deed goes unnoticed. Jesus said, "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42). Loyalty to God will be rewarded. The above verse indicates that even what we consider a small act of goodness (giving a cold cup of water) will not escape the eyes of the Eternal One. Of course the ultimate reward of heaven is what man should desire above everything else. Receiving an earthly house is nice (as the midwives did) but it is the eternal home in heaven that will be sweetest of all. God offers this eternal reward to all that will wisely obey His will (Matthew 7:21-27).

Pleasing God does not require special and unique skills. Siphrah, Puah, and Jochebed did not need a doctorate degree in theology to please God. They were not masters at playing the flute, nor were they Rhodes scholars, or astronauts that walked on the moon. They had no professional titles, were not CEO's, or college professors. They did not preach to large audiences, or sing solo in concerts. They were not cheer leaders, homecoming queens, or the belle of the ball. No, they were just lowly Jewish slave women. They had acquired no honorable place in the Egyptian society. Their clothes may have been old and tattered. Their houses may have had a leaky roof and their hair brittle and dry. Being slaves meant that they had very little as far as material possessions are concerned, and yet they pleased God.

What did they have that brought them success in Heaven's eyes? They had an (1) unwavering faith in our awesome Creator, (2) a willingness to obey regardless of the consequences, and (3) courage to carry out the will of God even if it meant painful punishment and loss of life. You do not need to be pretty, smart, rich, popular or humorous to be justified before God. A hundred years from now the only thing that will really matter is, was I faithful to God. Did I obey God. Did I have the courage to keep His commandments as these great women have done?

Conclusion: These women were some of the greatest women to ever live on God's green footstool. Godly women who faithfully and courageously serve in the Lord's church are, without question, the greatest women living on the face of the earth today. Women have meant so much to God's scheme of redemption in ages past, and it is no less true today. All of us should thank the Lord and pray for every woman serving bravely in God's one church. What a wonderful privilege it is to work along side of them and to see their love and devotion they have for the Lord.