

7. The writer showed how Joseph's faith looked to the future day of exodus and return that God's covenant oath to Abraham pledged. If the patriarch's descendents were to inherit the land promised to him, they could not remain in Egypt forever; one day they would depart that land and make their way toward Canaan. Yahweh had indeed appointed that day, but as a day of divine *deliverance*, and not mere departure. God was going to deliver His people, but through a human agent. That person, along with the circumstances of his birth, life, and work, comprise the Hebrews writer's next examples of faith (11:23-28).
- a. The Scriptures identify Moses as that human deliverer, and the writer followed the flow of the scriptural narrative by first speaking to the faith of Moses' *parents*. As with all of his other examples, he affirmed their faith, not by explaining to his readers what they *believed* (he made no mention of that), but what they *did*. Faith that actually exists – faith that is real – will always manifest itself. This is because faith owns God's purposes, promises, and work, and so conforms to them (cf. James 2:1-26). So it was with Moses' parents, and the act of faith the author mentioned was their shielding their new baby from the pharaoh's edict (11:23). Once again, the author provided only a brief summary, but his readers would have known that he was referring to the episode recorded in Exodus 1:1-2:2.

The context for this action was the horrific circumstance in which Jacob's descendents found themselves after the death of Joseph and the pharaoh he served. As time went on, the memory of Joseph and his exploits on behalf of Egypt faded from the Egyptians' national memory, so that what remained was only a growing concern about the strange, separatist Hebrews living among them. The Egyptian rulers shared this concern, especially as they watched the Hebrew community swell to well over a million individuals (ref. Exodus 12:37). Such a multitude posed a serious threat, not only by their sheer numbers, but especially if they chose to align themselves with any of Egypt's enemies. Eventually it was decided that the best way to mitigate the threat was to subject the Hebrews to harsh labor. This would serve several purposes: first, an exhausted, starving, and broken people aren't much of an adversary. But hard labor would also significantly reduce the Hebrews' numbers, even as Egypt enjoyed the benefit of a massive slave workforce (Exodus 1:8-11).

But, just as the Egyptians' fears were not realized (the Hebrews didn't raise an insurrection or ally with their enemies), neither were their aims: The more they sought to reduce the Hebrews' numbers, the more they increased. Such things don't happen, and this strange outcome provoked fear among the Egyptians, to the point that the pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill every male child born to Israelite couples. Almost certainly some of them complied, but the narrative characterized these midwives as "fearing God" and refusing to obey this directive. Their explanation to the pharaoh was that the vigor of Hebrew women enabled them to give birth before a midwife could arrive (1:11-21). Whether or not he believed this, he decided that he needed to entrust the task to his own people. Thus he commanded all Egyptians to take note of Hebrew births and see to it that the male offspring were seized and drowned in the Nile (1:22).

The pharaoh obviously understood that this course of action would eventually result in the Hebrews' extermination, and thus the elimination of his valuable slave labor. This alone indicates how concerned and fearful he had become; he was all too willing to forfeit abundant free labor for the sake of insuring his own well-being and the well-being of his kingdom.

It was during this time that Moses was born to a man and woman of the tribe of Levi, and they were careful to hide his birth from those who would honor the pharaoh's command. It's hard to imagine any parent not taking that action under such circumstances, but, in their case, the Exodus account specifically attributed it to them finding their baby to be a *beautiful* child (2:1-2). The Hebrews writer noted this same motivation, and associated it with the parents' *faith*. For this reason it's especially important to understand this "beauty" and its significance.

- This Greek adjective ("beautiful") is uncommon in the Septuagint and occurs just twice in the New Testament, which makes it more challenging to determine the writer's meaning. The other occurrence is in Stephen's discourse, when he was speaking of the very same events (Acts 7:20). The Septuagint reading of Exodus 2:2 uses it, which is the likely reason the Hebrews author used it. (He tended to use the Septuagint in his citations.)

In general terms, the adjective connotes splendor, majesty or elegance. Used of people, it can refer to outward beauty or the essential "splendor" of dignity, nobility or pedigree. Here it seems to suggest that Moses' parents detected in him some kind of notable distinction that they interpreted as the peculiar working of God's hand. Indeed, this is how Stephen interpreted this verse: "*Moses was beautiful in the sight of God.*"

- This, then, is the lens for interpreting Moses' parents' *faith* in hiding him: Whatever they concluded about this baby's distinction, they were convinced that he must not be allowed to die. *The God who had distinguished him in his appearance surely had a unique purpose for him.* And so Moses' parents hid him, not because he was a pretty baby, or even because of natural parental instincts, but as a act of *faith*; an act that expressed their sure confidence in God's faithfulness. This doesn't imply that they saw their son as God did – as the deliverer appointed to lead Israel out of Egypt and to the inheritance promised to the patriarchs. This is certainly possible, but merely believing that God had a purpose for their son within His purposes for Israel rendered their action an act of faith.

It's impossible to know what exactly Amram and Jochebed believed about their baby boy, but they obviously saw something that told them God had ordained him for some notable purpose. They couldn't know what He had planned, and He didn't reveal His plans to them. It was enough for them to know that Israel's God would prove faithful to His covenant promises to the fathers. With that faith, they secured their son within their home, not fearing the king's edict.

But as the baby grew it became increasingly difficult to conceal him, and soon Moses' parents reasoned that their best hope for saving him from death in the Nile was to deliver him into it – not through Egyptian hands, but into God's hands. *They would protect their son from the river the Egyptians believed to be the manifest power of their god Hapi – the god of Egypt's life and well-being – by giving him to the God who created the river.* Thus, in a marvelous irony, Moses' parents did what the pharaoh had commanded, relinquishing their baby to the waters of the Nile (Exodus 2:3-4). The writer didn't speak to this part of the story, but he obviously had it in mind when he noted that Moses' parents concealed him *for three months*. So he doubtless regarded this action, as much as their hiding their infant boy, as an act of faith. For they had no way of knowing what fate awaited their baby when they left him helpless in his little ark among the reeds lining the riverbank. Setting him there and walking away, they were entrusting him to the care of their God. Yes, their daughter could watch and see what happened and try to influence the outcome, but she had no control over it.

When Amram and Jochebed made the decision to leave their baby in the reeds along the Nile riverbank, they had every reason to expect him to die. He was only three months old and wouldn't survive long on his own out in the elements. He would likely die in less than a day if no one heard his cries and rescued him. And if someone did discover him, there was a strong possibility that he would end up enduring the very fate pharaoh intended for him.

- If the person finding the baby was Egyptian and believed him to be a Hebrew child, he would most likely either leave him to die or throw him into the river as pharaoh had commanded.
- And even if another Hebrew found him, would that person be willing to risk his own life by helping a Hebrew baby boy, when the pharaoh had commanded that they all be killed? Beyond that, it was unlikely that a Hebrew would be willing to take someone else's baby into his home and bear the burden of feeding and caring for him, when every Hebrew family was already suffering to the point of starvation. And if an Israelite discovered what he perceived to be an Egyptian baby, was there any chance at all that he would do anything to help that infant?

Every reasonable outcome seemed to indicate that their son would soon be dead, and yet Moses' parents, convinced that their God – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – had a purpose for him, willingly entrusted their baby to Him. The One who had given them this unique child would surely take care of him and see to it that he would survive to fulfill his calling. There was no way to know or predict what awaited their baby, either in the short term or the long term. But what Amram and Jochebed were fully assured of was that their God would prove faithful. He would accomplish in and through Abraham's descendents what He'd determined and decreed, and their son would most certainly fulfill his own ordained role in that grand, all-encompassing plan.