

# The Courageous Midwives

Exodus 1:15-22

Pharaoh is afraid of the Israelites because they are growing, and when oppression doesn't work he moves to genocide. The seed of the serpent tries to eliminate the seed of the woman, but he underestimates the Hebrew midwives. Shiphrah and Puah fear God more than Pharaoh so they faithfully risk their lives and so begin the deliverance of Exodus.

## Genocide

The nation of Israel multiplies to 600,000 men, plus women, children and the mixed multitude when they leave (12:37-28). The more Pharaoh oppresses the more God blesses, multiplying the people (v12). This is not a miraculous multiplication, but just the typical stupefying way the Creator designed it. In the midst of rigorous labor (x7 in vv. 13-14), husbands and wives in Israel love one another and are fruitful! Trouble and persecution ought to bring us together, not tear us apart, and cause us to renew our hope for the future. Because this happened in Israel, the king of Egypt summons the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to command them to put to death all the baby boys born to Israelites. They are to allow daughters to live, but sons must die (vv15-16). Pharaoh plans for the daughters to be married to Egyptian men and become part of their culture, thus ending the Hebrew (*foreign*) threat. These women are likely the heads of the midwives' guild. Shiphrah means "beautiful" and Puah means "splendid"; these women are radiant before the Lord. Pharaoh wants to make instruments of life into means of death in order to systematically eliminate Israel as a distinct people. This not a racial genocide because Israel is multiracial. This is a religious and cultural genocide, an attack of the seed of the serpent upon the woman (cf. Gen. 3:15, 20:3, 26:6). The Messiah can't be born without a father. The Messiah has come but the message is still stifled. In America Christians and others are losing their right to free speech under the doctrine of multiculturalism which labels things we have always believed as hate speech, chasing speakers off college campuses, and limiting where we can pray. Pharaoh spoke as a god, and if there is no God above the state, the state functions as god. Other rights are not far behind if the church doesn't wake up.

## Civil Disobedience

The midwives fear God so they cannot take part of the king's murderous plan (v17). When he finds out and asks why they are saving the male children, they lie to him, saying the Hebrew women are livelier than the Egyptians and give birth before they arrive (vv18-19). Their statement might be strictly accurate, but it's still deceiving. The 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment forbids us from bearing false witness against our neighbor. It's about falsely incriminating someone in court. But we're also commanded to speak the truth in the love, and Jesus says to let your yes be yes and your no, no (Eph. 4:15; Matt. 5:37). All the law is summed up in the two greatest commandments, to

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love God and love your neighbor. Is helping a ruler murder a bunch of babies loving him or the babies? Paul teaches that the government is God's servant, His deacon, to administer justice and therefore we ought not to resist him (Rom. 13:1-7). Were the apostles in sin when they told the authorities they would obey God and not men (Acts 5:29). Of course not. Shiphrah and Puah join the ranks of godly women like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Rahab, Mary, Corrie ten Boom and countless others who craftily deceived and defied evil authority. It's clear that when any authority compels you to break the law of God, you must resist. Not only was it morally acceptable to disobey and lie to Pharaoh, it would have been immoral to go along with his plan. Augustine described four kinds of lies:

1. Playful: games, jokes, stories and plays.
2. Obliging: to protect the innocent.
3. Military: deception in battle (cf. Jdgs. 4).
4. Destructive: breaking the 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment.

While we are to be a truth-telling people, only one of these is principally off-limits. J.B. Lightfoot said Shiphrah and Puah's deception was "not a lie but a glorious confession of their faith."

## Victory

This is the beginning of the exodus, and two Hebrew women are unknowingly leading the way. They stand up even though it will probably mean their death, which is what it means to fear God more than men. At the time many faithful Israelites would have pointed out that their resistance is futile. Israel as a whole was very compromised in Egypt (Josh. 24:14; Ez. 20:8). We don't necessarily suffer because we are in sin, but it's often the case. Job's predicament is not the common one. Regardless, God always uses our suffering to glorify Himself and conform us to the image of Jesus. But first we ought to examine ourselves to see if we are suffering for good reason. Israel needed to get rid of the idols they were serving. God allowed the Egyptians to oppress them in order to liberate them from sin (Ps. 105:25). The fire began to refine, and again they multiplied (v20). For the midwives who preserved the posterity of Israel, God established their households and preserved their posterity (cf. 2 Sam. 7:11). Seven times in this passage the word *midwives* occurs. They have become matriarchs and rebirthed the people of God. The Lord sees all suffering. He heard Pharaoh's decree to drown the boys in the river and no doubt saw many boys die (v22); the first plague will turn the Nile into blood. He knew the attack was upon the sons and so the last plague claims every firstborn son in Egypt. In the exodus, Pharaoh's whole army will be drowned in the sea. God is at work. He sees the oppression throughout the world today and calls us to be like the midwives. Fear Him

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more than Pharaoh.