

The Women Who Defied a Nation: Exodus 1:15-22 Explained Scriptures for Today

Exodus 1:15-22

And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah: 16 And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. 17 But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive. 18 And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive? 19 And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them. 20 Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. 21 And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses. 22 And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

A Command Targeting the Point of Life

Exodus 1:15-16

And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah: And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live.

“And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives” shows Pharaoh does not begin with soldiers. He targets those present at birth because they control the outcome at the moment life appears.

“of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah” identifies the two women responsible for overseeing births. These are not random assistants. They are positioned where every delivery passes through their hands.

“When ye do the office of a midwife” defines their role. Their purpose is to assist in bringing life safely into the world, which makes the command a direct reversal of their calling.

“and see them upon the stools” places the command at the moment of delivery. This is the point where life is visible and vulnerable.

“if it be a son, then ye shall kill him” is a direct order to end life at birth. This is not judgment after wrongdoing. This is the destruction of innocent life at its beginning.

“but if it be a daughter, then she shall live” shows selective destruction. The intent is to weaken the future strength of Israel by eliminating the next generation of men.

This is authority attempting to control population by targeting birth itself.

Fear of God Governs Action

Exodus 1:17

But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.

“But the midwives feared God” establishes the controlling authority in their decision. Their actions are governed by God, not Pharaoh.

“and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them” shows direct refusal. They reject the command completely.

“but saved the men children alive” shows they act in opposition. They do not remain neutral in this matter. They directly defy the king of Egypt. They actively preserve life.

Fear of God produces action that directly contradicts sinful authority.

Authority Confronts Disobedience

Exodus 1:18

And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive?

“And the king of Egypt called for the midwives” shows they are brought before authority to answer for their actions.

“Why have ye done this thing” shows that obedience to God is questioned as wrongdoing. The king of Egypt believes that the midwives have done wrong by not obeying him.

“and have saved the men children alive” confirms their actions are known and cannot be hidden. They didn't hide their righteous actions. Don't ever hide when you are doing right.

Standing for truth results in direct confrontation.

Their Answer Preserves the Outcome

Exodus 1:19

And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them.

“Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women” removes Pharaoh’s assumption of control. His command depends on the midwives being present and able to act at the moment of birth.

This statement says the situation does not function the way Pharaoh expects. The Hebrews do not follow the same pattern of childbirth that would allow intervention.

“For they are lively” is not general energy. It refers specifically to **the condition during labor**. “Lively” means: 1) Strong in labor. 2) Active in delivery. 3) Not delayed or dependent. This describes women who progress through childbirth without needing extended assistance. The process moves quickly and forcefully.

“and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them” explains the timing problem in detail.

“are delivered” means: The child is fully born. “ere” means: Before.

“the midwives come in unto them” shows the midwives arrive **after the birth has already taken place**. So this creates a gap:

- Pharaoh’s command requires action **at birth**
- The midwives are arriving **after birth**

That removes the moment where the command could be carried out. And you don't see the Bible mention anything that Pharaoh did to these midwives. There's no action taken by Pharaoh given in the Bible. They defied Pharaoh and did the right thing.

God’s Response to Fear of Him

Exodus 1:20-21

Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses.

“Therefore God dealt well with the midwives” shows divine approval from the Almighty Creator of all things. Their actions align with God’s will. That’s what we want. Our actions need to align with the will of God. God responds in their favor. He is on the side of the midwives.

“and the people multiplied” shows numerical increase. Pharaoh’s plan was to reduce the population by killing male children, but the result is the opposite. This establishes a principle: Man attempts to stop God’s plan, but God overrides the outcome.

“and waxed very mighty” goes beyond numbers. This is strength and not just growth in numbers. Churches can have growth in numbers but no increase in strength. Or we can increase

in strength without increasing in number. Or we can have both. This was both growth and strength.

“Mighty” means: 1) Strong as a people. 2) Increasing in ability. 3) Becoming harder to control.

Pharaoh’s goal was weakness through population control. Instead, the people become stronger. Pharaoh will never stop the will of God.

“because the midwives feared God” gives the cause. This is not just about what they did, but why they did it. Fear of God:

- Overrides fear of authority
- Produces action that aligns with God
- Becomes the basis for God’s response

This ties the blessing directly to their internal motivation, not just this external action that they took.

“that he made them houses” is not about physical buildings alone. This refers to establishment and continuation. “Houses” means:

- Family lines
- Stability
- Ongoing presence

God is establishing them personally while they are preserving the nation. God responds directly to obedience that aligns with His authority. Opposition does not stop God’s plan. It often produces the opposite result.

Fear of God is not passive. It produces decisions that affect real outcomes. God not only preserves His people as a whole, but also establishes those who act in line with His will. Pharaoh tried to weaken the people at birth, but God multiplied them and established the very women who refused to obey the king of Egypt.

Expansion of the Command

Exodus 1:22

And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

“And Pharaoh charged all his people” expands the command beyond the midwives. The responsibility now moves from a controlled point at birth to the entire population. This removes dependence on specific individuals. Enforcement is no longer limited to those present at delivery.

“Every son that is born” removes selectivity at the level of enforcement. The command applies to all male children without exception. This eliminates gaps where the command could be avoided. The target is now total.

“ye shall cast into the river” changes the method. The midwives were commanded to kill at birth. Now the command is to take the child and throw him into the river. This shows:

- The act is physical and visible
- The responsibility extends beyond birth
- The entire population is involved in carrying it out

The river becomes the instrument of death. Pharaoh is showing how evil he happens to be.

“and every daughter ye shall save alive” maintains the same pattern. Female children are preserved while male children are removed.

This continues the strategy of weakening future strength by eliminating the next generation of men. What did Pharaoh change? Think about this.

The first command: 1) Targeted midwives and 2) Required action at birth.

This command: 1) Targets all people. 2) Extends beyond birth. 3) Requires participation from the entire society.

Authority increases pressure when resisted. When the initial command fails, it expands in scope and intensity. So, when someone is trying to control you, they will increase pressure when resisted. They want power and control. You don't give it to them. They will increase pressure.

Control shifts from private enforcement to public enforcement. Sin is no longer hidden. It is required openly. The responsibility for wrongdoing spreads across the population, not just leadership.

When the command to kill could not be enforced at birth, Pharaoh expanded it to the entire nation so that no child would escape. He's going around the decision that the midwives made. So, you will see evil leaders using this same strategy. Beware of these evil leaders.

I want you to remember that God's authority overrides human authority at every level. Fear determines obedience. The authority you fear most controls your actions. Sinful authority often targets the point of life to control the future. God blesses those who act under His authority, not those who submit to sin.

Practical Applications

1. Refuse to participate in sin even when commanded by authority.
2. Let fear of God determine your decisions at critical moments.
3. Act to preserve life and truth, not just avoid wrongdoing.
4. Expect confrontation when you oppose corrupt authority.
5. Trust that God sees and responds to obedience.

Conclusion

Pharaoh controlled a nation, but he did not control these women. They stood at the point where life was decided, and they chose to preserve it. Their authority came from who they feared. They feared God. When you are placed at the point of decision, who will you obey?

Let's pray.