

Title: Our God Delivers: Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Faith

Text: Exodus 1:15-22

Date: Jan 16, 2022, at FBCW

INTRO.

Background. At the beginning of Exodus 1 – the people of God (Israelites/Hebrews) were dwelling safely in the land of Egypt.

- Everything was wonderful!
- In fact, God sent them there in a previous generation to provide for them.
- During a famine in Jacob’s generation...
- Though divine providence...Joseph had gone into Egypt...rose to power...and organized the brilliant feeding system that literally kept the nation alive during famine.

Gen 50:20, you meant it for evil, but God used it for my good, to bring it about that many people would be kept alive.

Under Joseph, the Hebrews had favor with the Egyptian Pharaoh. Everything was well!

But the years went by. Eventually after Joseph and Pharaoh passed away...a new Egyptian king rose to power.

- Exod 1:8, *Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.*

LESSON. Don’t be surprised when the attacks happen in the middle of your obedience!

- “But I was obeying God!” – yes, but when else would Satan attack you?

The Story

This is how the narrator describes the Hebrews in the land of Egypt after Joseph’s death.

- *Fruitful...increased rapidly...extremely numerous.*
- There was an Israelite population boom!

It’s noteworthy that the Hebrews were doing exactly what God told them to do in Genesis 1-2.

- *Be fruitful...multiply...fill the earth.*
- In one word, God’s people had been obeying!

But slowly, the Hebrews/forefathers lost their political clout in this foreign land.

- The New King (Pharaoh) was concerned with the growing Hebrew population.

The very government that had been previously sensitive to the things of God and the people of God – becomes hardened and intimidated! (Exod 1:9).

- Instead of learning from the Hebrews success – the Egyptians seek to control them.

VV 9-10:

- *Their population is getting out of hand.*
- *If war breaks out...we could be in a mess! ... They could join our enemies.*
- *Or we could become so dependent on their labor, what if they leave us?*

V10 → Egyptians, “Let us deal *shrewdly* with the Israelites”

- Manipulation.
- Taskmasters...oppression...forced labor...heavy burdens.
- Worked them ruthlessly...strenuous labor.
- Manufactured bricks...field work.
- Imposed their will...made the Hebrews’ life bitter (miserable).

V12 → *But as the labor/aggression against the Hebrews got worse...somehow the people multiplied more.*

Keep in mind – there is no sign the Egyptians asked themselves, “*Are we wrong?*”

Keep in mind – there is no sign the Egyptians asked, “*Should we change our approach?*”

- It was all coercion, manipulation, control.

V15 → The population surge of the Hebrews became so significant, the Egyptian king thought of this hopelessly hateful strategy → *let’s eliminate all the baby boys.*

This was the King’s specific plan: he approached two Hebrew midwives (Shiphrah) (Puah).

- Midwife = assist the mom in delivery of her baby.

The king’s order was the complete opposite goal of a midwife’s mission.

- Midwife = deliver a normal, healthy baby (safe for baby and mom).
- King’s demand = if baby is male, kill immediately. If female, let live. If male, kill.

Now who were these Midwives? All we know: Shiphrah and Puah (v 15).

- Note, the narrator mentions so few people by name.
- Narrator doesn’t even mention Pharaoh by name.
- Narrator does mention Shiphrah and Puah – approval/impressiveness of their faith!

Shiphrah = fair one ... Puah = girl. → Simple, ordinary, young women!

- Not men.
- Not strong, wealthy.
- Not connected politically.

But this is so powerful → they feared God more than they feared the Egyptian king!

V17 → Three actions → 1) feared God 2) disobeyed king 3) let the boys live.

V18 → The king notices the population has not declined/slowed. He inquires with the ladies, “*What is going on?*” “*How are all these boys still being born?*”

V19 → The midwives now (divine coincidence) deal shrewdly with the Egyptian king!

- Some have called their language deceptive.
- We don’t know – it could be true – again, we don’t know.
- We know the narrator doesn’t pass judgment on them.
- We can clearly see God is interested in protecting His people from Pharaoh’s evil!

Whether their testimony is true or not, we see that – 1) Pharaoh seemed to believe them ... and 2) God honored them.

They say, “These Hebrew women are tough...not like the Egyptians...they are vigorous...they have given birth before we even arrive!”

This is a great reminder for us:

- No matter how opposed the evil world might be to the truth of God.
- If God is in something...it cannot be stopped!

V20 → *So God was good to the midwives...*

- The nation was blessed.
- Many lives were saved.
- God blessed Shiphrah and Puah with families (security, companionship, stability, legacy).

Main Idea of the Text: Shiphrah and Puah disobeyed the king’s command but pleased the Lord and saved lives in the process.

Today’s Big Idea. The real aim of our lives must be obedience to God, and we trust Him with the results.

First, we must recognize that we exist in a world that is truly opposed to the things of God.

- Our battle is not people (Eph 6:11).
- But our battle with evil is primarily against Satan.
- Satan aims to confuse/corrupt every person, family, government he can.
- He especially seems to like to work against (on) people in power!

I say this with respect: just because a government says do (or don’t do) something, it doesn’t make it right!

- ILLUS: Peter and John were told to stop preaching the gospel!
- Acts 4:19, *Whether it’s right to listen to God more than you, you judge...but we cannot stop speaking about the things we’ve seen and heard...*
- Acts 5:29, *For we must obey God rather than men.*

Second, the wisdom that we need comes only as we set our aim on pleasing the Lord.

- You'll notice this "God first" principle/rhythm in the Scriptures.

Great Commandment: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength.*

Matt 6:33, *Seek first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things...*

Prov 9:10, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*

James 1:5, *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all generously.*

I'm not saying that life is easy... YES, heavy decisions are often complicated.

- But God's Word will not lead us astray.
- And God's wisdom is always available to us through prayer/faith/asking.

Third, like the background of this story – we are all one generation away from losing our Christian identity as a people.

- At one time the Egyptians were engaged in the Hebrew way...but then later...not!

If we don't reach kids/grandkids – and kids grow up hearing/believing whatever they want – it's very dangerous for society.

Prov 22:28, *Do not remove the ancient landmark, which your fathers have set.*

Is everything our ancestors said/did right? Of course not!

Is everything our ancestors said/did wrong? Of course not!

We need BOTH –

- 1) Parents/grandparents: talk about your faith...testimony...salvation...hard times.
- 2) Young people: ask...listen...learn.

Faith is far more likely to become central/sure to our kids when they know it's the time-tested anchor of our life as adults!

Fourth, God can take our obedience and do things for us that people cannot do!

This is such a good helpful verse. Sometimes...

Prov 16:7, *When a man's ways please the Lord, he can make even his enemies be at peace with him.*

Shiphrah and Puah had a decision to make –

- Obey Pharaoh...possibly be in favor with him...but disobey God, hurt others. – OR –
- Obey God...trust the results to Him!

CONCL. Inspiring story of the song, “I have Decided to Follow Jesus” was spread through the ministry of Indian evangelist Peramangalam Porinju Job (1945-2012), who was internationally known and sometimes referred to as “the Billy Graham of India.”

According to Job’s account, the words that form the basis for the song were the last words spoken by a martyred Garo tribal man from Meghalaya (then a part of Assam) named Nokseng. Accounts vary, some claiming that Nokseng was evangelized through the efforts of an American Baptist missionary (*Bibliatodo Reflection*, 2020, n.p.) and others suggesting a Welsh Methodist missionary evangelized the man and his family (wife and two children) [Stier, 2014, n.p.]. The account of what happened is taken from Job’s book and appears on several internet sources. Upon hearing of the man’s conversion, the angry . . . village chief summoned all the villagers. He then called the family who had first converted to renounce their faith in public or face execution.

- Moved by the Holy Spirit, the man sung his reply, “I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back.”

Enraged at the refusal of the man, the chief ordered his archers to arrow down the two children. As both boys lay twitching on the floor, the chief asked, “Will you deny your faith? You have lost both your children. You will lose your wife too.”

- But the man replied, again singing, “Though none go with me, still I will follow. No turning back.”

The chief was beside himself with fury and ordered his wife to be arrowed down. In a moment she joined her two children in death. Now he asked for the last time, “I will give you one more opportunity to deny your faith and live.”

- In the face of death, the man sang, “The cross before me, the world behind me. No turning back.” He was shot dead like the rest of his family.

But with the deaths, a miracle took place. The chief who had ordered the killings was moved by the faith of the man. . . In spontaneous confession of faith, he declared, “I too belong to Jesus Christ!” When the crowd heard this from the mouth of their chief, the whole village accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior.¹

¹<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/history-of-hymns-i-have-decided-to-follow-jesus>