

Fearing God above the King
Exodus 1:15-22
November 8, 2023

Question: What are some examples in the Bible of people fearing God, not including our text?

Question: What is the main idea of this passage? Keep in mind the context.

Question: What does this passage reveal about the king of Egypt?

The midwives fear God (15-17)

verse 15

The Israelites are called “Hebrews” in this passage

1. Abraham was called a Hebrew
 - Genesis 14:13 “Abram the Hebrew”
2. The term may have originally referred to the descendants of Eber, a great grandson of Shem (Gen 10:24; 11:16-26)
3. The term is used repeatedly in the Bible to refer to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Over time, the term was replaced by the term, “Israelites.”

The king of Egypt gives an evil command to “the Hebrew midwives”

1. Midwives aided at childbirth by taking the newborn, cutting its umbilical cord, washing the baby, salting it, and wrapping it¹
2. Rachel had a midwife helping her when she was in labor with Benjamin (Gen 35:17), and Tamar had a midwife helping her when she gave birth to Perez and Zerah (Gen 38:28)
3. These are midwives for the Hebrew women, and appear to be Hebrews themselves, for the two names are Semitic not Egyptian.

It stands out that the names of these two midwives are given to us

Shiphrah and Puah appear to be the heads of a group of midwives

¹ John Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus*, 2nd edition, 58.

verse 16

“the birthstool”

The king commands the midwives to secretly kill the Hebrew baby boys at birth

It was the males whom Pharaoh feared would rise up against Egypt (verse 10)

Here the king continues to foolishly try to oppose God’s purpose to multiply the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Question: Does Pharaoh’s plan to kill the baby boys remind you of a similar event elsewhere in the Bible?

This is part of the unfolding of the prophecy in Genesis 3:15,
 I will put **enmity** between you and the woman,
 and between your offspring and her offspring;
 he shall bruise your head,
 and you shall bruise his heel.”

The offspring of the serpent will not succeed in destroying the offspring of the woman!

verse 17

The midwives rightly understood that they were ultimately responsible to God for their conduct

They courageously obeyed God even though it meant disobeying the most powerful ruler in the world, and would likely cost them their lives

They had courage to do so because they feared God far more than they feared Pharaoh

The apostles would do the same

- Peter and John disobeyed the Sanhedrin
 - **Acts 4:18–20** So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”
- All the apostles disobeyed the Sanhedrin
 - **Acts 5:27–29** And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.

God rewards the midwives (18-21)

verse 18

verse 19

The truthful answer would be that they feared God and it would be wrong in His sight to do as the king commanded.

They answer the evil king deceptively, apparently in order to protect innocent human life, possibly the lives of baby boys, the other midwives, and themselves.

This raises the question, is it ever right to speak deceptively to a person intent on doing evil?

1. Some theologians say no, such as John Murray in his book, *Principles of Conduct*. Other theologians say yes, such as John Frame in his book, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*.
2. I agree with Frame
3. There are Scripture passages where God's people answered evil people, who were intent on doing evil, deceptively with apparent divine approval
 - Rahab (**Josh 2:1-6; 6:16-17; Jas 2:25**)
 - Elisha (**2 Kings 6:18-20**)
 - Jeremiah (**Jer 38:14-16, 24-27**)
4. There are passages where God acts so that evil people would be deceived
 - God sent a lying spirit against King Ahab (**1 Kng 22:19-23**)
 - God will send a powerful delusion so that the wicked will believe a lie (**2 Thess 2:9-12**)

It seems that it was acceptable in God's sight for Shiphrah and Puah to answer Pharaoh deceptively, for two reasons...

1. Pharaoh was wickedly seeking to kill innocent people, and Shiphrah and Puah's intention was to save innocent lives, making the situation similar to the above examples with Rahab, Elisha, and Jeremiah
2. God rewards the midwives

verse 20a

God protected the midwives

verse 20b

The Lord continued fulfilling the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

verse 21

Their reward matched what they did in saving babies' lives. God blessed them with the very thing Pharaoh had commanded them to prevent.

The king continues to command evil (22)**verse 22**

Commands all the people of Egypt to be involved in killing the Hebrew baby boys

Changes his policy of trying to kill them secretly, to killing them openly

Question: How does this verse relate to what is coming next in Exodus?

It is evident that either numerous other male infants escaped along with Moses, or the decree was eventually revoked, since Moses was not the only male of his generation to survive

The point is...

1. This policy was in force when and where Moses was born
2. The very policy that Pharaoh intended to diminish the Israelites was overturned by God to become the channel by which God would raise up and equip the deliverer through whom He would set His people free²

Conclusion

We continue to see...

1. The Lord's faithfulness to His promises
2. The folly of trying to oppose His purposes

We also see a powerful example of fearing God

We see the sanctity of human life

² John Mackay, *Exodus*, 46.