

SESSION 2

WHEN LIFE IS EXPENDABLE

▶ **The Point**

Life is a gift from God we are to protect and preserve.

▶ **The Passage**

Exodus 1:16-17,22-2:9

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Over seventeen years have passed since 9/11, but those old enough to remember that day in 2001 can still tell you exactly where they were when they heard or saw the events occur. We watched, numb with shock, as reports showed two planes flying into the World Trade Center, one plane flying into the Pentagon, and another plane crashing into a field in Pennsylvania. The total estimated death toll was nearly three thousand people. As difficult as it is to comprehend, a greater tragedy in magnitude occurs every single day in America. More than three thousand unborn babies are killed by abortion in our nation every day. Since *Roe v. Wade* was handed down in 1973, over 60 million babies have died—the equivalent of 20,000 9/11 attacks. Culture may not value all human life, but God does. Whether it is an unborn child, one with physical or mental challenges, or an elderly person who has become incapacitated, God sees a human being He loves deeply and who was created to bear His image. We should understand that God places a high value on life—and we are to protect and preserve His gift of life. Two women who lived in the harshest of times did just that, and God blessed them.

▶ **The Setting**

After the time of Joseph, a new Pharaoh came to power in Egypt who had not known Joseph. He was concerned with how quickly the Israelite population was growing and feared they might side with Egypt's enemies. Therefore Pharaoh enslaved the Israelite population, but they continued to multiply. (See Ex. 1:1-14.) Pharaoh then issued an order for all the Hebrew baby boys to be killed by the midwives. But Pharaoh's schemes to destroy the Israelites were no match for the power and providence of the one, true God.



What does the Bible say?

Basket made of bulrushes (2:3)—The Hebrew term means “ark” and is also used for the ark Noah built. (See Gen. 6–9.) The baby Moses was placed in a small papyrus basket.

Exodus 1:16-17,22; 2:1-9

1:16 “When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.

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1:22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”

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2:1 Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months.

³ When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. ⁴ And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him.

⁵ Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it.

⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.”

⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?”

⁸ And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Go.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother.

⁹ And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed him.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

Exodus 1:16-17

¹⁶ “When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Exodus 1:16-17 on page 79 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 79 of the PSG: **“What are some ways our culture devalues life?”**

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the background for the Hebrew midwives.

RECAP: This form of wholesale slaughter is nothing new, however. Pharaoh threatened to use it to wipe out the Israelites enslaved in Egypt. He based his killing plan on race and gender. Only the Israelite boys would be killed. No ultrasound machines existed in that day, so the only way they would have known if it were a boy was by serving “as midwife to [them] and see them on the birthstool.” The biblical writer did not record how the midwives were to perform this violent act—but he did report that they “did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them.”

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 80 of the PSG: **“What might it cost us to stand up for those who can’t protect themselves?”**

RECAP: God will remember all those who oppose injustices against the unborn, the aged, and the weak. When we stand up against the abuse of others, He is with us. When we fear God more than we fear people and work to protect life, our actions will greatly impact generations to come.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see that not only does the fear of God lead us to respect all human life, but we should do what we can to protect others.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

Why does the fear of God lead to respect for human life?

Exodus 1:16-17 Commentary

[Verse 16] Scripture reveals that Pharaoh (“the king of Egypt,” Ex. 1:15) had no respect for human life. He feared that the fast-multiplying Israelites within Egypt’s borders might side with Egypt’s enemies against him. Despite enslaving the Israelites and forcing them to do hard labor, their numbers continued to grow. Therefore, Pharaoh issued a devastating order. He commanded the midwives, **“When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.”**

Pharaoh enlisted “the Hebrew midwives” (v. 15) in his diabolical plan. While some commentators have attempted to argue that these were Egyptians and others have suggested that two midwives could not have served the entire Israelite people, the most straightforward interpretation is that these were in fact the two Hebrew midwives who served the Israelite women in birthing their babies. The women’s names, “Shiphrah” (meaning “dawn” or “fair”) and “Puah” (meaning “fragrant” or “splendid”), were appropriate Semitic names for that time and place.

The term used by the writer (Moses) in describing them, “Hebrew,” is the ethnic term that the Old Testament uses to describe the Israelites and disassociate them from foreigners. The “Hebrew midwives” and “Hebrew women” were being distinguished from the Egyptians.

Why would Pharaoh have expected the Hebrew midwives to murder the baby boys of their own people? Pharaoh was the absolute ruler in Egypt. Most likely, he was not accustomed to being ignored or disobeyed, so he probably assumed the midwives would obey him. There probably was the threat of punishment for disobedience as well as the promise of reward for fulfilling his command.

Why kill just the Israelite boys? Most likely, since males made up the armies of any group or nation, the loss of the Hebrew boys would have crippled the Israelites’ ability to rebel against the Egyptians. Also, since in that time period females depended upon males for support and protection, the loss of the male population would have eventually led to a decrease in the female population as well.

[Verse 17] Moses detailed that the Hebrew midwives did not obey the command of Pharaoh. Instead, because they **feared God** more than they feared Pharaoh, the Hebrew midwives did not do as the king of Egypt had ordered. The midwives are to be applauded for their bravery; they had to choose, and for them the choice was clear if not easy. They chose to obey God and not Pharaoh. They refused the order to kill the boys.

As used in this instance, “feared God” does not mean abject terror or fear as one might have of snakes, spiders, or the dark. Instead, it carries the meaning of a reverence for God, which is expressed in being honest, trustworthy, faithful, and obedient to God’s commands. While the Hebrew midwives probably had little more than a vague, general knowledge about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they revered and respected God more than they feared the wrath of Pharaoh. In doing so, they probably risked a death sentence if they were ever found to be disobeying the Egyptian king’s order. Even so, the Hebrew midwives let the Hebrew boys live.

Exodus 1:22–2:3 Commentary

[Chapter 1, Verse 22] The midwives had done what they could to protect the lives of the male Hebrew babies. Eventually, Pharaoh summoned the Hebrew midwives and demanded an explanation as to why they were not killing the Hebrew boys. (See Ex. 1:18.) The midwives explained to the Egyptian king that the Hebrew women were not like the women of the Egyptians. The Hebrew women were strong and gave birth to their babies before the midwives could arrive to assist in the process. (See v. 19.)

The Egyptian Pharaoh changed his strategy. Since the Hebrew midwives could not be relied upon to do his will, Pharaoh engaged the people of Egypt in his new plan. He commanded the Egyptian people, **“Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”**

[Chapter 2, Verses 1-2] The focus of the narrative shifts from the Hebrew baby boys in general to one specific boy. A Hebrew man married a Hebrew woman, both from the tribe of Levi. Their names are not given, indicating the primary focus is on the baby boy soon to be born. Later in the Book of Exodus, it is revealed that the man’s name was Amram and the woman’s Jochebed. (See Ex. 6:20.) The significance of both the man and woman being from the tribe of Levi was that it indicated the child to be born was without a doubt from the tribe of Levi. The tribe of Levi would later be set apart to provide spiritual leadership (see Num. 8:6-26) and act as the mediators between God and the Israelites. (See 3:10.)

The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. For three months they hid the baby boy, an act of faith on the parents’ part. (See Heb. 11:23.) The specific mention of three months is probably due to the fact that at around three months, the baby’s cries would have been louder and he would have been growing to the point of being too big to simply hide around the house should the need arise.

[Verse 3] Unable to hide her child any longer, Moses’ mother prepared a **basket made of bulrushes** for him. She sealed it with **bitumen and pitch**. Doing this would have made the basket watertight and provided the baby in the basket with an extra layer of protection against the heat of the sun. She placed that baby amongst the reeds on the bank of the Nile River.

Bible commentators suggest two possible reasons why Jochebed placed the papyrus basket containing little Moses among the reeds in the Nile River. One view suggests Moses’ mother may have placed him amongst the reeds in the hopes that Moses would be found there. Another view is that the baby was placed among the reeds along the Nile because it was the best place to hide the child. The child could be retrieved for feedings and at night.

Undoubtedly, Moses’ mother’s faith was part of the reason she placed him in the reeds. Just as the parents’ actions in hiding the child for three months were based on their faith in God, so too this action of placing the baby in the basket in the reeds on the shore of the Nile River ultimately would have been an act of entrusting her baby to God’s care and protection.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

Exodus 2:4-9

4 And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. 5 Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. 6 When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" 8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 9 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Exodus 2:4-9 on page 83 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand how God miraculously intervened to save Moses.

RECAP: Throughout the story we see the hand of God at work.

God was at work to accomplish His purposes. God is still at work today—and He wants to do His work through us! Some churches have campaigns to recruit foster families or to raise adoption funds to help families in their church seeking to adopt. Beyond adoption, we can and should also provide for the elderly, abused, those with physical and mental challenges, and outcasts. God's Word calls us to care for widows and orphans—those who are helpless.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

Where do you see God at work in this story?

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 83 of the PSG: **"What steps can we take to provide for those we protect?"**

GUIDE: Refer back to **"The Point"** for this session: **"Life is a gift from God we are to protect and preserve."**

Exodus 2:4-9 Commentary

[Verse 4] As this dramatic account continued, several more people are introduced into the narrative that risked a great deal to do what they could for the baby Moses. Specifically, Moses' sister and Pharaoh's daughter—an unlikely pair—worked to care and provide for the infant.

This verse introduces Moses' sister, most likely Miriam. Her actions indicate she was between six and twelve. She was old enough to watch over her baby brother in the reeds, but young enough to not be involved in the typical duties of an older female around the house and working in the fields.

[Verses 5-6] Whether the intent of the family was to hide the baby or leave him in the hope that someone would find him, through the providence of God, Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe in the Nile River. She saw the basket among the reeds and commanded one of her servants to retrieve it. When she opened the basket she recognized the child as a Hebrew. In direct disobedience to her father, she decided to adopt the baby as her own. (See Ex. 2:7-10.)

[Verse 7] Moses was probably crying because he was hungry. Alertly, Moses' sister approached them and offered to get a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby. In all these events, the providence of God is evident. The Nile River, which the Egyptians sought to use for the death of the Hebrew boys, became for Moses the means by which God ensured he would live.

[Verses 8-9] Pharaoh's daughter commanded Moses' sister to get a Hebrew woman to nurse the boy. She went and got the baby's mother, her mother. When Jochebed arrived, Pharaoh's daughter commanded her to nurse the baby in exchange for wages. Whereas before Jochebed had been forced to hide her child, now she took the boy home with her and was able to nurse him openly.

Ironically, it was the women who thwarted Pharaoh's plan when all along he was focused on the danger he saw from the male Hebrew population. Ultimately God did what was best for Moses. On the surface it sounded like Miriam was doing the princess a favor by finding a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby, but this was all part of God's plan to protect and prepare Moses to one day be the deliverer of His people.

In the ancient world, the weaning of a child normally took three years. While Moses would forever be Amram and Jochebed's son, "when the child grew older" (when he was weaned), he was given over to Pharaoh's daughter to raise as her son. She named the baby boy "Moses." She did this because she "drew him out of the water" (v. 10). The name "Moses" is derived from a verb meaning "to draw out."

God was still at work. Moses was raised as a royal son, a prince, and not a slave. Acts 7:22 states, "Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds." He most likely was instructed in such fields as mathematics, astronomy, music, law, government, science, diplomacy, and military weapons and warfare. There was a divine purpose in the events of Moses' life. God was over time equipping him physically, intellectually, and spiritually to lead His people out of bondage.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 84 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Pray.** Pray each day for the thousands of unborn babies who are at risk right now. Pray for the women and families that have been impacted by abortion. Pray for our politicians and officials to enact pro-life legislation.
- ▶ **Discover.** Find out what ministries in your community support life and offer hope to those who feel helpless.
- ▶ **Get involved.** Find others in your community—the unborn, the aged, or those with physical and/or mental challenges—and work to see that they are not forgotten or devalued by society. Help them find their purpose and worth in Christ.



Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 84 of the PSG:

The number of ways life is devalued around us seems immeasurable and the challenges we face sometimes seem insurmountable. One believer at a time though—one church at a time—we can make a difference.

PRAY: Conclude by praising God for being the author, protector, and preserver of life. Ask Him to give group members His eyes to see those who most need our help, and the courage to step in just as Miriam did.



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