

# SCORNE TO *Celebrated*

## Shiphrah and Puah Exodus 1

Once upon a time, in a church not so far from here, sat a couple who longed for a child of their own. Though married for over five years, God had not granted their desire. They prayed, fasted, and sought help from medical experts.

The doctors determined their inability to conceive was likely due to a late-diagnosed hernia when the young minister was a child. Trusting God when doctors expressed no hope, the husband followed strenuous recommendations, including his least favorite, taking ice-cold showers for over two years. Even while complying

with the doctor's advice, they knew the ultimate decision belonged to God. Placing their desires at the feet of Jesus, they decided no matter His answer, they would be content and would serve Him faithfully.

Cultural norms during biblical days were difficult for couples who struggled to provide an heir for their namesake. The Bible is full of women who pleaded to God for a child of her own: Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah, to name a few. For wives, it was vitally important to conceive and have children, not just because it was the

longing of their hearts, but because their legacy and name were to be passed to their children. Daniel Block wrote in *Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel*, "For ancient Israelites, the most important contribution a woman could make to a household was to present her husband with children. Indeed, the noblest contribution a woman could make to a household in general and her husband in particular was to bear a son for him. Through childbearing a woman earned her place in life and her share in the household. Conversely, failure to deliver on this obligation was viewed as a curse and a shameful disgrace."

Many Old Testament scholars believe the Israelite midwives were women who could not or did not have children. As a result, they were tasked with delivering the Israelite babies—an insensitive career choice, to be sure. Every day they were surrounded by what they desired but could not have. These women may have been

scorned in their culture, but God had incredible plans for them.

### Application:

**What are you longing for? In what circumstance are you pleading for God's intervention?**

**Are you prepared if God's answer is *wait*? Or if His answer is *no*?**

Pharaoh was concerned about the quickly increasing number of Israelites in Egypt. If war were to break out, the Egyptians would be outnumbered. He decided he must intercede. In his first plan, he overwhelmed them in slavery, which resulted in an Israelite population exploding (Exodus 1:11-14). In his next attempt, he instructed

**"But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live" Exodus 1:17**

the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to kill all newborn males (verse 16). For this greatly increasing community, Shiphrah and Puah were probably not the only midwives, but the midwife leadership who stood before Pharaoh to receive his instructions. "But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live" (verse 17). Their disobedience saved Israel from extermination.

**Application:**

**Imagine for a moment you were Shiphrah, Puah, or one of the midwives.**

**What were the reasons to obey Pharaoh?**

**What were the reasons to follow your heart and disobey?**

**Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation? If so, what did you choose to do?**

Another essential cultural norm of this time was naming people and preserving that person's name throughout time and history. (Read through the census of names in Numbers 1-4 and 26.) Note that in this particular story, Shiphrah and Puah are called by name, but the king of Egypt or Pharaoh is only known by his title. "God dwelt well with the midwives" (verse 20), even to the extent that He inspired Moses to record their exact names to be read in His Word throughout all time. Isn't that an encouraging thought?

God also honored their actions by giving them children. "And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families" (Exodus 1:21). Out of their devotion to Yahweh, they risked their own lives by refusing to kill the infant Hebrew boys. The name *Shiphrah* means prolific, and *Puah* means childbearing. God honored their reverence, blessing them according to their names. When God intervened in Shiphrah, Puah, and the other midwives' lives, they went from being scorned in their culture to celebrated.



**Application:**  
**How has God rewarded you for your obedience and reverence to Him?**

## **Jochebed** **Exodus 2:1-9**

Let's look at another woman living during this time who also went from scorned to celebrated through God's intervention. Pregnant Jochebed is introduced in Exodus 2 but unnamed. She is later named in the family record in Exodus 6:20 as the mother of Aaron and Miriam. Jochebed gave birth to a gorgeous, healthy, Hebrew boy named Moses. Because of Shiphrah, Puah, and the midwives' historical decision, Baby Moses was not killed. Once the king learned his previous plans had failed, he ordered all the Hebrew boys who survived birth to be cast into the Nile. Jochebed's faith was tested as she also defied the edict (Exodus 2:2). "By faith Moses, when he was

born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment (Hebrews 11:23).

**Application:**  
**How has your faith been tested?**

Jochebed and her family hid a newborn baby for three months. (I'm not sure I could hide an infant baby for ten minutes! Well maybe, if he or she was asleep!) This decision was a beautiful sign of the family's faith. They trusted God would resolve their situation.

Let's speculate a bit: This courageous mother worked diligently for three months to keep her son quiet and ultimately alive. Moses was not her first child, so Jochebed knew she couldn't continue this silent childrearing indefinitely. No doubt she prayed for

direction. She received the answer, but could she be hearing correctly? She must have been sleep-deprived! She was to place her precious baby into the Nile River. Can you imagine how she must have wrestled with the uncertainty of this plan? Maybe pregnant Shiphrah came to check on mom and baby and reminded Jochebed that God is faithful and could be trusted to provide safety for little Moses.

As chapter two continues, we see God at work. Jochebed placed Moses in a waterproof basket and placed him in the river. Older sister Miriam kept an eye out, and watched as Pharaoh's daughter discovered the basket with the Hebrew baby boy in it (a Hebrew boy with a bounty on his head). Moses started crying and maybe Miriam saw compassion in the princess when she looked upon the beautiful baby. Miriam had spent three months helping take care of Moses—she knew he was a keeper. And Pharaoh's daughter was hooked too. Miriam stepped forward, "Shall I go get him a nurse for you?" (verse 7). The princess agreed immediately, and Miriam knew just whom

to get—their mother, of course! See God's faithfulness in verse 9: "And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.' And the woman took the child and nursed him." God not only returned Moses to his mother and family, but they were *paid* to take care of him. Only God can do something that incredible!

God saw Jochebed's heart, He heard her prayers, and He interceded on her behalf. Her faith is honored in Hebrews 11, the *faith chapter*. As He did with Shiphrah and Puah, God went above and beyond. God returned Moses to his family and provided them with financial support. And even beyond this miracle: recent brain research indicates that years birth to age three are the most important years in a child's development. During the most influential years of Moses' life, he was surrounded by a family who feared the Lord. The faith of Jochebed and her husband Amram lived on in their children. Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness. Aaron was appointed high priest. Miriam was a leader

of the Hebrew women. In Jochebed's life, God's intervention took a scornful circumstance to a celebrated story of faithfulness.

**Application:**  
**When has God gone above and beyond in your life, or in your family's life?**

Lynn Cowell, with Proverbs 31 Ministries, shared a unique look at the story of Shiphrah, Puah, and Jochebed. She imagined their stories like a play.

**Act 1:** Shiphrah, Puah, and the midwives feared God more than Pharaoh and allowed the Hebrew boys to live.

**Act 2:** Between labor pains, Shiphrah, Puah, and Jochebed discussed their situation and pieced together a plan to keep Moses a secret.


**Act 3:** After the discovery of Moses, Miriam courageously approached Pharaoh's daughter to offer assistance with the Hebrew baby. Curtains close. Lynn points to the courageous

faith of Shiphrah, Puah, and Jochebed and the ripple effect it had on Miriam.

**Application:**  
**What kind of ripple effect will your faith have?**

When God intervenes in our circumstances, things inevitably change. Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed, and the Hebrew midwives showcase this fact. Each of them faced a scornful situation that would have failed if left to their own devices. But God did not leave them alone in their condition; He interceded. Through His intervention, God's chosen people multiplied, thrived, and ultimately reached the Promised Land. No doubt, these ladies would tell us every moment of uncertainty and fear was worth it.

God is always worth it. So, keep the faith. Be unrelenting in your pursuit of Christ. Someday you might share your own story

of how God's intervention came into your life right on time and changed everything. Remember that couple I told you about at the beginning of the study? God intervened in their circumstances and did what doctors said was impossible. I am the result of God's intervention; my parents were that young couple. 

***About the Writer:***

Sarah Sargent is a third-generation member and leader of FWB Women's Ministries. She began serving on the WNAC Board in 2013, and has been a member of the *Shine* team since its inception, both as speaker and writer. Sarah currently serves as president of the women's ministry at Reynoldsburg FWB Church and vice president for the Ohio Free Will Baptist Women's Ministries. A proud alumnus of The Ohio State University, she is a lover of all things Disney and her Labradoodles, Regal and Lexi.

The logo for 'Shine' is rendered in a light red, cursive font. The letter 'S' is large and loops around the 'h'. The letter 'i' is replaced by a stylized asterisk or starburst shape. The letters 'n' and 'e' are also in a cursive style.

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