

SHIPPORAH & PUAH

In Exodus 1, we are introduced to two characters who were owed a big debt of gratitude by the nation of Israel. Shipporah and Puah were midwives in Egypt whose refusal to carry out direct orders from the Pharaoh probably spared the lives of countless Hebrew baby boys. Israelites had been accepted in Egypt since the time of Joseph's life because of his status in Egypt many years prior. The Israelites had acquired land and were growing greatly in number. As Joseph's renown finally phased out, the new king sought to keep them from growing even more and becoming more powerful. So, the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites and assigned harsh slave drivers over them to suppress them as much as possible. They mercilessly enforced their might over the Israelites, but Israel continued to multiply and spread. So, Pharaoh developed a new plan to suppress the Israelites.

¹⁵ Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shipporah and Puah: ¹⁶“ When you help the Hebrew women as they give birth, watch as they deliver. If the baby is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live.” ¹⁷ But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king's orders. They allowed the boys to live, too. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt called for the midwives. “Why have you done this?” he demanded. “Why have you allowed the boys to live?” ¹⁹ The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women,” the midwives replied. “They are more vigorous and have their babies so quickly that we cannot get there in time.” ²⁰ So God was good to the midwives, and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful.

-Exodus 1:15-20

APPLICATION

Pharaoh had almost unlimited power and ultimate authority in Egypt. He carried every significant title in those times that yielded the utmost respect and fear – he was a man, he was rich, he was KING. But for some reason,

these two simple midwives found the courage within themselves to ignore a direct command from him. What would make them take such a stand despite potentially severe consequences? Shipporah and Puah feared God more than they feared Pharaoh. They were more concerned with their spiritual standing with God than with their earthly standing with the king. They resolved that there was no earthly punishment severe enough to make them go against the very thing they were called to do. They were midwives called to preserve life, not to end it.

Fear of God should not be confused with a cowering fear of punishment. This type of fear is an earthly fear perceived through lenses of potential pain or loss. Earthly fear is limited in its capacity to transform us at our core. Rather, fear of God is having a true sense of His divinity and majesty. It stems from a realistic assessment of His righteousness and our sinfulness. It is based more in humility and awe than in judgement and consequence. It draws us in rather than pushing us away. Although God's wrath and judgement is a reality, He would rather move us by the promise of His favor than by the fear of His wrath. To put it another way, earthly fear asks, "What is He going to DO TO me?" while spiritual fear asks "What is He going to THINK OF me?".

DISCUSSION/CONTEMPLATION

- *THOUGHT:* A healthy fear of God may force you to face some earthly fears.

- What is your understanding of earthly fear vs. spiritual fear?

- What are some of your greatest earthly fears?

- Do you fear God more than you fear man?

D6-CUSSION

Use this story to discuss how bravery is not the absence of fear. Rather, it is how you respond to fear when it arises.

- What stands out to you the most?

- What questions do you have?

- What is an application for your life?

PRAYERS & PRAISE