



The book of Exodus! Babies, burning bushes, and plagues, oh my! Yes, it's cheesy, but Dorothy following the yellow-brick road to find her way home kind of reminds me of the ancient Hebrews following God to the Promised Land. It's an extraordinary journey filled with danger, miracles, strange moments, and a longing for home.

Tradition holds that Moses wrote the book of Exodus, approximately 3,500 years ago. In ancient Hebrew, the first word of the book is “and.” In other words, it's a direct sequel to the book of Genesis, and it opens exactly where Genesis left off: with God's people in Egypt.

Joseph had moved his extended family there to keep them safe during the famine, and they stayed. But Exodus goes on to take a bit of a time jump in the story—mentioning how the earlier generations have all died off, the Hebrews have grown in number, and the new Pharaoh, who didn't remember how Joseph had saved Egypt from famine, began to fear the growing number of Hebrews living in their nation.

To control them, to keep them from trying to take over, and to hopefully slow down their growth, Pharaoh forced them into slavery. This sets the stage for the two passages we are going to look at today.

Exodus 1:15–20 (NLT)

Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah 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.

This is the first moment of civil disobedience recorded in Scripture! Civil disobedience means refusing to obey an evil law because of a higher good.

It’s a biblical principle. Romans 13:5 teaches us that we should not violate our consciences. In Acts 5:29, when commanded to stop teaching about Christ, the apostle Peter said, “*We must obey God rather than any human authority.*” We see examples of civil disobedience throughout the Bible: Peter, Daniel, Rahab, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and so many others.

The story of these two women is incredible. Their courage blows my mind. Put yourselves in their shoes. God has been silent for generations. Their people have been made slaves. From all appearances, there is no hope, yet they stand up to Pharaoh. From their perspective, they were guaranteeing their own death, but it was worth it to follow God in protecting life. And Scripture says that God blessed them for it.

They don’t hide. They don’t manipulate. They boldly refuse to do what they know is wrong, and rather than flee, they stand before Pharaoh and give one of the greatest explanations of all time. These Hebrew women are too vigorous and have their babies before they can even get there! Do you see the smack talk? Reading between the lines, they’re essentially saying the Hebrew women are better than the Egyptian women!

In the church, we usually don’t bother talking about Shiphrah and Puah. We like to skip to Moses, the burning bush, the face-off with Pharaoh, and the parting of the Red Sea. But the liberation of the Hebrews, the beginning of God’s salvation of his people, began with these two women.

The story continues. Upset at that failure, Pharaoh gives a new order—for every male baby to be thrown into the Nile River. It’s horrific. And three more women enter the story.

A woman gives birth to a boy. She makes a basket, places the baby in the basket, and sends it down the Nile River in the direction of Pharaoh’s daughter. This Hebrew mother has her daughter, a girl named Miriam, follow and watch the baby the whole way. Pharaoh’s daughter finds the baby, immediately recognizes it as a Hebrew baby, and in a moment of mercy, decides to adopt him. Miriam shows tremendous courage, approaches the daughter of the most fearsome man alive, and suggests her mother to be a nurse for the baby! Pharaoh’s daughter adopts this Hebrew baby, pays his birth mother to care for him, and gives him the name Moses.

And then, another time jump happens in the narrative. The story picks up decades later, when Moses is 40 years old.

Exodus 2:11–15 (NLT)

Many years later, when Moses had grown up, he went out to visit his own people, the Hebrews, and he saw how hard they were forced to work. During his visit, he saw an Egyptian beating one of his fellow Hebrews. ¹² After looking in all directions to make sure no one was watching, Moses killed the Egyptian and hid the body in the sand. ¹³ The next day, when Moses went out to visit his people again, he saw two Hebrew men fighting.

“Why are you beating up your friend?” Moses said to the one who had started the fight. ¹⁴ The man replied, “Who appointed you to be our prince and judge? Are you going to kill me as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?” Then Moses was afraid, thinking, “Everyone knows what I did.” ^{15a} And sure enough, Pharaoh heard what had happened, and he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in the land of Midian.

There’s a lot going on in this passage. The first thing to notice is that from the moment Moses enters the picture, he has a sense of justice. Even though he has grown up in Pharaoh’s household, receiving an Egyptian education, distant from his people, he knows he’s a Hebrew.

Acts 7:22 points out that Moses had a sense of right and wrong that came through his Egyptian education! But even though his intentions may have been sincere, he is impulsive in his actions. He sees the Egyptian hurting the Hebrews, but he waits until there are no witnesses to strike and kill the man. He tries again the next day to be the hero to his people, but he gets called out and is full of fear when they realize his actions are known.

It’s also important to note that Moses received a death sentence. Let’s be clear ... if he had been born into Pharaoh’s household, he absolutely could have killed someone without fear. His Hebrew ancestry is what put him at risk. Pharaoh knew who he was, and tolerated his presence because of his daughter, but he did not hesitate at the opportunity to rid his household of a Hebrew slave masquerading as his grandson.

Ultimately, Moses tried to act in secret, without the guidance of God. His impulsive action, his attempts to cover it up, and his escape to the

wilderness all point to him not yet being the man of God he will eventually become.

In the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, the Coward Lion sings a song;

*I'm afraid there's no denyin'
I'm just a dandy-lion
A fate I don't deserve
I'm sure I could show my prowess
Be a lion, not a mouse
If I only had the nerve ...*

I love that line, “Be a lion, not a mouse.” In these two passages we’ve looked at today, who was a lion? Who was a mouse?

Shiphrah and Puah were lions! They displayed incredible courage, boldly taking a stand in front of everyone at great personal risk. Moses may have been sincere, but he did it in secret, in fear, and ultimately fled for his life. **Moses was a mouse.**

There are three things that we can learn from these two passages:

God calls us to have courage. Nowhere in the Bible does it promise that taking a stand for God will guarantee our safety. Far from it ... Shiphrah and Puah survived, but they didn’t expect to. But Scripture does tell us to have a bigger perspective; to have the confidence that things of God are more important than the temporary things here. In other words, understanding God and eternity makes taking a stand now worth it.

1 Corinthians 16:13 (NLT)

Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.

Psalms 56:3–4 (NLT)

But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. ⁴ I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?

The comment about “mere mortals” isn’t promising safety; it’s emphasizing that in God’s plan, they don’t stand a chance of winning in the end. We