



# Thoughts from the Bible and Books

A Newsletter for University Reformed Church  
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## Oh to Have Faith Like a Hebrew Midwife!

Exodus 1:17 hit me right between the eyes.

The people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, so that the land of Egypt was filled with them. So far so good. But there arose a Pharaoh over Egypt who did not know Joseph. Frightened and prideful, the Pharaoh made quick work of enslaving the Israelites. Their lives were hard and bitter.

But God knows how to win a fight—give the good guys (gals actually) more babies than the bad guys. The more God’s people were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. So the Pharaoh said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, “When you attend a delivery—if it’s a girl, let her be. If it’s a boy, kill him.”

Which brings us to verse 17: “But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.”

I’ve heard this story a hundred times, but what arrested my attention was the startling, yet matter-of-fact juxtaposition of verses 16 and 17. Now, as far as I know, all the verse 17s in the Bible are next to verse 16s, but not many pack a punch like the pair in Exodus 1. Here’s the most powerful man in the most powerful country in the world commanding a couple of lowly slave ladies. Were they afraid for their lives? Did they panic? Did they weep and wail? We don’t know their emotional state. But we know they were fearful—afraid of

Egypt’s king perhaps, but more terrified at the thought of disobeying the Lord. Do you want to know the source of their mighty courage? They feared God more than Pharaoh. I cannot get over how verse 16 gives way to verse 17. “‘Kill the baby boys,’ the King decreed... but the midwives feared God.”

“Fear God?” we might ask. “Did not God bring them to Egypt where they were enslaved. Was not God allowing his people to be oppressed and mistreated. What was God doing anyway—what could God do—to stop this new Pharaoh hell-bent on infanticide? Fear God who is sitting idly by while the world’s most powerful man sets out to destroy our people? No, let us fear Pharaoh.”

Oh to have faith like a Hebrew midwife! We are so easily given to fear and so rarely is it before the face of God. Verse 17 in the story of our lives often reads, “But they feared Pharaoh and did as he commanded.” Or, “But custom dictated and they went along with the crowd.” Or, “But family

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expected...” or, “peer pressure demanded...” or, “colleagues insisted...” or, “the movies assumed...” or, “the system required...” And so it goes that we fear loss of life, loss of reputation, loss of status, and loss of privilege more than we fear God.

It is not for no reason that the Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). It is only when we fear nothing but sin and no one but God

that we can begin to make prudent moral decisions in life. If we are not afraid of God, we will be afraid of everything and everyone else. We will not be wise and we will not be midwives.

I can hear the objection. “Everyone knows that God does not really mean we *fear* God. Instead, we honor him, respect him, and reverence him. True enough, perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). We are not afraid that God might not be for us, but against us (Romans 8:31). We are not nervous about future punishment, knowing that there is no longer any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

But could it be that even after all our caveats, the Bible uses the word “fear” because we really are supposed to *fear* God? If we are going to have faith like Hebrew midwives maybe we need a word with a little more juice than “respect.” You respect on-coming traffic at a 4-way stop and you respect the running game of the Patriots, but you fear the Lord. In Exodus 20, the Lord descends on Mt. Sinai. When the people see the thunder, lightning, and smoke, they tremble and step back. “Moses, you speak to us. But do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” Then Moses offers this stranger con-

solation: “*Do not fear*, for God has come to test you, *that the fear of him may be before you*, that you may not sin” (20:20). Apparently, there is a wrong way and a right way to fear God. We should not fear destruction, but we should fear disobedience. We should not fear hell, but we should fear his holiness. We should not fear condemnation, but we should fear his consuming fire.

The bottom line is that we will never display strength in the face of temptation, or courage in the face of opposition, or boldness in the face of disapproval unless we think it a bigger deal to disobey God than to disappoint men. In Jesus’ day, many believed in him, “but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God” (John 12:42-43). Without the fear of God in our lives, we may manage to look like decent, respectable, nice people, but we will not receive the glory that comes from God. We will not shine as light and preserve as salt. And we would have killed Moses.

Lord, make us more like Hebrew midwives.

~ Kevin DeYoung

## **We’re Moved In (Again)!**

If you were at the Congregational Meeting/Celebration/Fiesta a couple Friday’s ago, you will remember that the 2005 budget includes no monies for “pastor relocation.” You’ll also recall Bob Sheehan’s explanation, “We’re not going to have to move a pastor this year—unless he burns down his house.” Well, try as I might, I could only fill the house with smoke. Now, after a month away from home and with few touch-ups left to be done, we are finally back into 2306 Northampton.

While I have certainly enjoyed my first six months in Lansing, I must admit to feeling a bit pathetic at times. If it’s not a cold, it’s the flu. If it’s not a stuffy nose, it’s a fever. If it’s not my house, it’s my back. The only thing left is for me to sprain my ankle (which happens at least once a year). Believe it or not, I really am only twenty-seven and my life is not usually marked by so many infirmities and mini-disasters.

Thanks for your help, prayers, and patience along the way. Hopefully, the DeYoung household will be blessed with normalcy for awhile. But just in case, someone may want to stick an ice pack in the freezer at church. That pulpit step is a real doozy.

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## **In Communion with the Saints**

“There was a day when I died, utterly died: died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will—died to the world, its approval or censure, died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends—and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God.”  
*George Mueller (1805-1898) on the secret of his service to God.*

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