

I don't really want to tell you my story, but Puah insists that I do...what are friends for, right? She never lets me forget that we stood up to the most powerful man in the world, and changed the future of the human race. She wants our story told.

Puah... She might be exaggerating a little bit? We were a couple of lowly slaves who were good mid-wives...and good liars. We did save thousands of babies...baby boys, and a few of them did turn out to be pretty special. One in particular!

Midwives and liars, I've gotta smile at that. You know what a mid-wife is...you still have them. Throughout the centuries, and into your time, trained doctors have not always been available to help women through the birth process. That's where we come in. Mid-wives are trained women, and men, who help moms through the birth process. It is the best job in the world. New life is our business. LIFE! Okay, yes, there's a lot of pain mixed into that *best job in the world*. In my day, we mid-wives had special knowledge of herbs and potions that helped women through the pain, and helped them speed the birth process. As painful then as it is now. Oh, but when you hear that baby cry, and see that mother's face...Puah and I didn't have any children then. But, our joy was complete in what we did.

Let me set up my story: More than three centuries before my time, Joseph and the other sons of Jacob moved from Canaan to Egypt. Joseph—such a powerful politician, the Egyptians allowed his family to settle in the Goshen region. They were shepherds. This was not a big deal, because the Egyptians were primarily farmers, not shepherds. Joseph's father Jacob was also named Israel, his descendants were known as the Twelve Tribes of Israel, or the Israelites.

The Israelites had large families, and after many generations there were hundreds of thousands of them. They were located way over in Goshen. But when a new Pharaoh came to power, he recognized the danger of them. What if they rebelled? What if all those Israelites, hundreds of thousands of them, united in a rebellion. So, he made them all slaves. They were forced into hard labor, they worked building public monuments and other buildings. Without machinery. Backbreaking, soul-crushing work. And it was endless. The Israelite slaves were treated ruthlessly by the Egyptians.

Puah and I were well-known midwives, pretty much the only well-known midwives, really, and we stayed busy. The Israelites produced babies as fast as desert rabbits. With every baby, we saw the joy of life under the heavy hand of rule. With every baby, the Pharaoh got more frightened of rebellion.

Finally, the Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the known world summoned Puah and me...two unknown, lowly midwives. I know, I know, I said we were well-known, but we thought that was just in our pregnant, Hebrew women circles. We were wrong. We were commanded by the Pharaoh himself... to kill the babies, if they were boys. Kill babies. But...we feared God more than the Pharaoh, so we did no such thing. Months later when nothing had changed in terms of population control, the Pharaoh called us in again and demanded to know why the baby boys survived.

“Well,” I said, “The Hebrew women deliver so quickly, the babies arrive before we get there! Pop right out, like desert rabbits” We didn’t say that last part. God was so pleased with us... he gave us families of our own! We had our own kids! But, as pleased as God was, Pharaoh was just as displeased. He commanded us, and all of the Hebrews, to throw their baby boys into the Nile and drown them.

One of the Hebrew descendants of Levi, married a woman from the same tribe. They had a daughter. Then, years later, a son. After three months, they obediently threw the son in the Nile...BUT...before doing so, they placed him in a waterproof basket. And they made sure the basket ended up in the exact location where the Pharaoh’s barren daughter bathed. The baby’s sister waited nearby.

Pharaoh’s daughter came to the river, discovered the basket, and took pity on an obviously Hebrew baby.¹ I say obviously because that is an important part of this story. Pharaoh’s daughter knew it was a Hebrew baby because the boy had been circumcised! No other people group circumcised their children. Just the Hebrews. This would be a reminder to the baby all of his life that he was a Hebrew.

The baby’s sister popped out of the reeds and asked if Pharaoh’s daughter would like her to take the baby back to the Hebrews where he could be nursed until a safe age. The baby’s sister, Miriam, would play a big part in his later life. That arrangement was made, and Pharaoh’s daughter agreed to pay for the baby’s care.

Pretty good deal. The parents saved the boy and got paid to raise him. At the appropriate time, the boy was brought back to the Pharaoh’s daughter. She named him Moses, and she raised him in the court of the Pharaoh. He received the best food and education. Our disobedience to the powers that be resulted in a Hebrew boy becoming part of the royal family of Egypt. Puah and I laughed for hours and hours about this.

Let me digress a little bit. Egyptian pharaohs were considered to be gods. When they died, their successors were considered to be gods, also. Unlike some other societies, the daughters of pharaohs often came into power. Sometimes, a son and daughter got married to keep things orderly.

¹ Exodus 2:6

The Bible doesn't say, but it is likely that Pharaoh's daughter had several children and nieces and nephews who vied for power. As a Hebrew, Moses would have been at a big disadvantage to becoming Pharaoh, but he very likely was a threat to other possible heirs.

Spoiler alert: In the far future, Moses will have a severe confrontation with a Pharaoh. That Pharaoh will likely be one of the relatives Moses grew up with in court... basically, a brother.

Moses is now an adult. One day, he leaves the palace and walks among the commoners, the Hebrews. He sees an Egyptian master beating a Hebrew slave.. No one is around, so Moses kills the Egyptian, and hides him in the sand. The next day, he goes out among the Hebrews again. He sees two of them fighting. He attempts to stop the fight, they turn around and taunt him, they ask "Will you kill us like you killed the Egyptian?" His murderous act was known! Being the step-grandson of the Pharaoh would not be enough to protect him, especially from his adopted relatives who were also his competitors. Moses flees the court, the palace, and the country to escape Pharaoh's wrath.

Moses travels to Midian, a desert area more than two hundred and fifty miles east of Egypt. While waiting by a water well, he encounters the seven daughters of Ruel, the priest of Midian. When some shepherds try to drive the daughters and their sheep from the well, Moses protects them. In gratitude, Ruel has Moses eat bread with him, and allows him to live with the family. Eventually, Moses marries one of the daughters, Zipporah. They have a son named Gershom.

After many years, Moses' step-grandfather died. The new Pharaoh was even harsher to the Israelites. They were given less resources and were expected to get more work done. Hours were long, conditions were unconscionable. The Hebrews suffered in ways few people groups in your time could identify with. There are some groups exploited like this today, but most of Western culture is shielded from their plight. No one helps the slave. There is no record in the Bible that God had had direct contact with the Israelites since the time of Joseph, hundreds of years before. The memories of their one true God were surely distant and dim, they were, however, in daily contact with the Egyptian gods in the culture around them. The Israelites called out to the only source who could save them, they cried out to God for relief.

God heard their prayers and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; that the Israelites were to have the land of Canaan. Change was coming.

Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Ruel², on Horeb, the mountain of God, pretty much just him, his staff, the sheep...when the angel of the Lord appeared in a flame of fire burning a bush. Moses saw that the bush was in flames but was not burning up. He was curious, he approached the bush.

"Moses, Moses!" It was God. "Take off your sandals. Don't come nearer. You are standing on holy ground." Can you imagine all the things going through Moses' mind? "I am the God of your

² Also named Jethro

father, of Abraham, of Isaac, and Jacob.” Moses hid his face. If he saw God’s face, he would surely die.

God continued. He had seen the Hebrews in their distress. He was determined to send them back to Canaan, the land he’d promised to Abraham. And here is the best part. God wanted someone to lead them out of Egypt— Moses.

Now think about it. A God that Moses barely knows is sending him back to the royal court that wants to kill him. Moses, like most of us would do, starts making excuses for why he should not go back. He definitely should not go back to Egypt. He definitely should not and does not want to go back to Egypt

Moses explains “I’m a nobody.” God tells him, “That doesn’t matter,” and that God himself will provide the power and the incentives for Pharaoh to set them free.

Moses insinuates that the Hebrews themselves won’t recognize his authority and that they don’t even know God. Who should I say sent me? “Tell them I AM, the god of their ancestors, sent you,” God says. The leaders of the Hebrews will go with you to Pharaoh, and he will refuse you until I punish him severely. Finally, you will actually plunder the Egyptians in their desire for you to leave.”

Moses makes more excuses. No surprise there. It’s a sticky situation. It’s family. *Royal* family. *Estranged*, Royal family. Moses herding staff? God turns it into a snake, then he strikes Moses with leprosy, and then heals him. In the end, God even allows his older brother, Aaron, to go as his side-kick. Moses is out of excuses. He gives in, he agrees to go back to Egypt.

As usual, the Bible doesn’t provide exact dates for the events in this story. But according to the text, Moses was eighty years old when he went back to Egypt from Midian. Aaron was eighty-three.³ The Bible says that all of Moses’ original enemies were dead when Moses took his wife, his sons, and Aaron back to Egypt. Picture it: A band of shepherding nomads emerge from the desert and descend upon the royal courts of Egypt. As an Israelite, I’ll tell you right now, I would not have found that inspiring. At all. Even as a mid-wife and one of his biggest fans.

When they arrived in Egypt, Moses gathered together the leaders of the Hebrews, and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. They performed signs before the people, and they believed what Moses told them. And when they heard that God was concerned about them, they bowed down and worshiped.

These Hebrew slaves were fired up and ready to go. Their misery was almost over, they were sure of it! All Moses and Aaron had to do was go appear to Pharaoh and their slavery would end.

³ Exodus 7:6-7

They were sadly mistaken.