

## Drawn Out

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This story has been interpreted in two extremes. Liberation theologians interpret the exodus as mere justification for revolt (justice). Sunday school lessons narrow the story down to the birth of a hero (Moses). Both have a bit of the truth, but when we combine them we still fall short of the story's meaning. Let's take a look at how these three stories show us an Exodus: a greater conflict, a deeper fear, a better plan.

### A Greater Conflict

Who is Pharaoh? His identity has been debated by historians and scholars for years, but the first thing we learn about him is what he doesn't know, [Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph](#) (8). Now with regime change it's not unusual to disregard the old guard, but this Pharaoh doesn't regard what Joseph did for Egypt. Despite the fact his people have been living peaceably with Egyptians for hundreds of years, Pharaoh sees them as a threat: [Behold the people have become \*too\* mighty and \*too\* many for us...they may fight against us, and war might break out](#). Notice hyperbole and allegation. Next we discover his **racist** agenda. He divides Israelites from the Egyptians by using us vs. them language, [Come let us deal shrewdly with them](#). He creates an enemy, one based Hebrew ethnicity. Once we alienate someone, it's easier to tear them down: gossip, slander, abuse. Hitler did it with Jews, British did in the West Indies, Americans did with African slaves. Now a problem for the Brits and Americans enslaving others was they were all influenced by the Bible. What do you do with *this* story? In 1808 a Bible was published that *removed the exodus narrative* and was sent to slaves. Why? [Because they knew the \*power\* of this story. The \*hope\* Exodus gives to the oppressed, that it doesn't demonize on the basis of color, but sees all peoples as equal](#). But not Pharaoh. Next we learn his claim to **wisdom**, let us deal *shrewdly*, means wise. [But looking at his policies we'll see, though proclaiming to be wise, Pharaoh turns out to be a fool](#). His policy unfolds in three phases: *enslave, oppress, depopulate*. Verse 11: [Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens](#) (11). Subjugate and afflict: to abase, degrade. He sought to exploit and degrade the Hebrews. Why? Economic reasons, to recruit a workforce big enough to build two great store cities. How did he do it? Phase 2, *oppression*. Verse 13-14 describe Pharaoh's

treatment of Hebrews as ruthless, bitter, enslaving work. In fact the description uses 7 words to describe their conditions. Why? It was certainly that bad, but why 7 words? In 1:7, Israel is described in opposing terms with 7 words: fruitful, multiplying, growing strong, words taken straight from Gen 1. What's going on? The author of Exodus is setting up a contrast. Pharaoh oppresses; God delivers. Pharaoh opposes population; God increases the population, which is why 12 says: *the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread*. Pharaoh is anti-creation, anti-Israel, and *anti-life*. Phase 3, *murder*. He calls in Hebrew midwives to require them to systematically slay every male Hebrew baby, then issues a decree for Egyptians to enforce infanticide. He steals their freedom, destroys their dignity, and kills their children. *Steal, kill, destroy*. What is this conflict all about? *Is it slavery, yes. Is it systemic injustice, certainly. But the conflict is greater*. Behind it all we're meant to see two powers: power of God, power of Satan. Two opposing policies: a policy of life and a policy of death. We're meant to see spiritual war. *Who is Pharaoh?* Historical squabbling misses the point. Worst of all, he's *anti-God*. Satanic. A stretch? What does Satan do? *Steal, destroy, and kill* (Jn 10:10). Natasha Robinson, an African-American marine and employee at Dept Homeland Security says: "*The enemy, the spirit behind white supremacy, is the spirit of the antichrist. It is not a human; it is not a political party; it is not progressive or conservative. It is a principality and power.*" The racial conflict is much bigger than social justice and politics. Our battle is not against flesh and blood. Spiritual war requires spiritual weapons. Robinson: *Prayer is a weapon. Praise is a weapon. Lament is a weapon. Building Christian communities who armour up a great defense. Do we win every battle? No. As for the war, we are assured victory. A conflict between unequals; God will topple the Satanic puppet!* Slaves outpopulate his plan of depopulation; midwives outmaneuver his wisdom. How?

### **A Deeper Fear**

A greater conflict requires a deeper fear. Pharaoh is so afraid he commands the midwives to kill the sons of Israel, but in an act of quiet, civil disobedience they refuse. He calls them in to ask why the sons are alive. They reply *Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them* (19). They deliver their babies too quickly! Who's shrewd now? Puah and Shiphrah outwit

an Egyptian ruler. But it's not just *women* getting the upper hand. In the ancient world, midwifery was typically undertaken by women who didn't have families of their own, infertile or unmarried, and had low social status. So, in addition to being marginalized for their gender, they're sidelined in social standing. And yet, they are named; Pharaoh is not! Why? *because of their civil disobedience, no, although they stand up to power. Because they're exemplary feminists, no, although they're a model for men and women. Because of cultural pride, no, although they advocate for their people.* They are named because they feared God not man: But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live (17). Pharaoh fears losing power, midwives fear true power. Deep fear, the *awe-fear-reverence* we saw in Moses before the burning bush. The fear that led Blaise Pascal to say, Are you afraid? Don't be afraid. If you're not afraid, be afraid. Fear of an devoted son not a quivering slave. Fear, reverence, submission to YHWH led to human flourishing. Why? They trusted, not in their wisdom but in God's wisdom. This is very different from some of anti-racism movements, based on snatching power. The names of Shiphrah and Puah are on our lips not because they snatched power but because they yielded to power—the right power *I am*. They refused to kill because they were accountable to an eternal authority. Secular humanism has nothing like this. Human rights are a modern invention can be unvented, but *this* is justice rooted in fear of God. People are made in his image. Now, some might object to lifting up these women, Didn't they lie? Perhaps, but it was pretty transparent. I like JB Lightfoot interpretation, "*this was not a lie but a glorious confession of faith.*" They put their trust in God not in civil disobedience, and God responds by rewarding them, So God dealt well with the midwives... and because the midwives feared God, he gave them families (19-20). He made the infertile fertile. He restored them. God works through the weak, the marginalized, the forgotten. Do you feel weak, inadequate? A new job, a new mother, a suffering, an injustice? God loves to work through the weak; it's *how* he works: through the submissive, the marginalized, the reverent—*through those who fear him*. His redemptive plan dazzles in women of deep fear.

### **A Better Plan**

A greater conflict, a deeper fear, a better plan. If we were in charge, we may have called for a slave revolt and skipped Moses altogether. But this final story is here to reveal God's

better plan. Moses' **mother** enters first. She probably hoped for a daughter given the Egyptian policy but in God's plan she's given a "fine" son. Fine means "fond of, nurture", which she does for three cherished months. But after that the baby's loud enough to be noticed. So she puts Moses in the Nile, but not quite as Pharaoh demanded. She places him in a basket in the reeds and his **sister**, the second woman, keeps watch at a distance. What will happen? Third woman, the **daughter** of Pharaoh, comes down to the river to bathe, sees the basket, and sends her servants to retrieve it. She opens it and sees a crying, male baby. Suddenly Moses' sister appears volunteering to find a Hebrew wet nurse, outwitting Pharaoh again *to preserve life*. Moses' mother raises him a few more years before returning him to Pharaoh's daughter. She names him Moses, which means "to draw out." Why is this story here? Israel was to cast their sons into the Nile, a place of death, but in the providence of God Moses is *drawn out* of the Nile, **life out of death**. Thousands of years later, another helpless Israelite baby is taken down into Egypt. To avoid *Herod's* slaughter of male infants. And guess what? Jesus is drawn out of Egypt back to the promised land, where he is raised by his mother, Mary, told her son will deliver his people, lift up her lowly estate, and *show mercy on those who fear him* (Lk 2). How will Jesus do it? By going down into death and being drawn out into life. Jesus brings life out of death; Jesus lifts up the lowly. God's better plan, always working behind the scenes, to bring life out of death. But it requires fear, faith, submission. There are times in life we can't imagine God is at work, overwhelmed by trial, discouraged by heartache, but this story is here to help us see God is always at work. If he hadn't permitted Israel's suffering, they may have never left Egypt. If Moses hadn't be placed in the Nile, he wouldn't have been spared or learned leadership from the Egyptians. And the women? What all these women did for Moses, God does for you in Christ. He nurtures you; he watches you, and he draws you out: out of sin, out of death, into resurrection life.