



image: Black is King,  
2020

## **Exodus 1:8-2:10 NRSV**

### Chapter 1

8 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. 10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” 11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. 13 The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, 14 and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, 16 “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.” 17 But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. 18 So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” 20 So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave

them families. 22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.”

## Chapter 2

1 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. 3 When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. 4 His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. 6 When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” 8 Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. 9 Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. 10 When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

## Background

This passage is central to Christians (and Jewish people) because of its ability to explain the “why.” Why do we struggle? Why does it seem that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? Why do many people in power seem so evil? This story gives us a rich background of Moses. Many remember Moses for the plagues, or his “let my people go” speech. But before we get Moses the liberator, there are at least two midwives who conspire to get him here. This passage engages the genre of a “trickster” tale, wherein everyday people trick the powers. In your own devotional period, read Exodus 1-3. What feels similar to you?

**Today’s lesson will focus on telling the right lies.**

**Read the scripture out loud together.**

**Discuss with someone in your home. When is it okay to tell a lie?**

### **What's happening during this passage?**

Under the shadow of a new king, the Israelites face genocide. The king, who “does not know Joseph,” has a plan to manage the too “numerous” Israelites. The plan is to “deal shrewdly with them.” In fact, the King is worried that in the event of a war, the Israelites will join the other side. So to keep them in check, the King sets taskmasters over them and builds supply cities. The text records how their “lives [became] bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor.” The taskmasters were “ruthless.” In order to curb the Hebrew population, the King told the midwives to kill all boys. The Hebrew midwives “Feared God” and did not do as Pharaoh asked. When questioned about their quotas, they lied and said “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.”

We do not know how many Hebrew children were saved through this disobedience.

### **Have there been moments when your reverence for God made you do something illegal?**

The Hebrew midwives chose to disobey Pharaoh, even though the threat of retaliation was real. Pharaoh was clear. Every boy that was born to Hebrews was supposed to be thrown “into the Nile.” While they were on the clock for the Egyptian Empire, they still remembered that God had other plans for them.

Biblical scholar Wil Gafney writes about the possibility that perhaps these midwives were not the only midwives in the land. Perhaps they were the head midwives. Perhaps there were large gatherings of midwives, and at these conventions, they all got together on one accord. While the text only shares a few details about Shifra and Puah, it is not out of the realm of possibility to imagine that they are surrounded (and supported) by scores of other women on a similar mission. It is nearly impossible to disobey the King if you do not have a community of support.

### **Why do you think Moses' Sister (Miriam) followed the basket down the river?**

Without Moses' sister to connect Moses to his birth mother, he would not have been able to nurse. This sacred act between Moses and his birth mother allows the two to connect. Without this nourishment, literal and figurative, Moses might not know where he comes from. Moses' mother can experience the connection

she needs as a mother, too. All this, of course, coming from a little unsuspecting lie from Miriam who suggested “I can get a nurse from the Hebrew women.”

**How many lies do you see in this passage? Which ones were life-saving? Which lies were life-endangering?**

Shiphra and Puah lied to save Hebrew children. Miriam lied to connect Moses and his birth-mom.

But Pharaoh, swayed by his own ego and fear of being rendered useless, lied to himself and to others. He spread a campaign to “Make Egypt Great Again.” He used the threat of a growing underclass to convince his minions to do his bidding. Worried that he would lose in a future war, he decided to target the Hebrews. Thankfully for the Hebrews, God was raising up an invisible resistance in the persons of Moses, Miriam, Aaron and others.

**What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?**



**Connection to Today's World**

Bree Newsome is famous for ripping a Confederate flag from a state building in 2015. But few people know that this was no spontaneous action. In fact, she had prepared and practiced climbing poles, light posts, and trees in advance of the action. While taking down the flag, she recited the Lord's Prayer

and Psalm 27. In videos of her act, she audibly says, “You come against me with hatred, oppression, and violence...I come against you in the name of God. This flag comes down today.” In her own words, she was frightened but also sure of God's protection on that day.

*I had no doubt about the decision that I had made at the time, but that didn't mean that I was oblivious to how dangerous it was and so it really did require faith on my part. I very much believe that God called me to scale the flagpole that day and I believe that God would bring me safely down. But faith is something that we practice, so even in that moment just praying and staying focused and calling out to God was very important.*

**Journal:** What law/norm/expectation do you think needs to be challenged?  
Why?

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**Closing:** Sing/watch “Somebody Prayed for Me,”

For a video, click here:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2sq-3moloKI>

Somebody prayed for me,  
Had me on their mind,  
Took the time to pray for me.  
I’m so glad they prayed,  
I’m so glad they prayed,  
I’m so glad they prayed for me.

**Prayer:**

Dear God,  
You see what we cannot. You feel what we cannot. You are where we hope to be.  
And yet, you somehow see what we feel, you feel what we feel, you are where we  
are.

Lord, there is so much trouble in this world. There are liars and evil people in  
charge all over this land. Even resisting is becoming dangerous these days.  
We know you are with us. Give us the courage to show up and be motivated by  
your call, and never by our own egos. Help us to do the right thing you’ve called  
us toward.

In Jesus’ name we pray,  
Amen

Works Cited:

Wil Gafney, Womanist Midrash

<https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/6/27/15880052/bree-newsome-south-carolinas-confederate-flag>

# Connection to Today's World

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## Related Glossary Terms

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