



August 24 • 2008

**Focus Scripture**

**Exodus 1:8—2:10**

Additional Scriptures

Psalm 124

Romans 12:1–8

Matthew 16:13–20

God of loving kindness and inspiring courage, we see your vision for just relations between people and nations. Sanctify our hospitality to strangers. Inspire our resistance against oppression. Enable our advocacy. Sustain our struggle. Amen.

# Courageous Women

Women play a prominent role in securing Israel's future, providing models of courage and persistence. God hears the cries of those who are oppressed and stands with them, and can be trusted to help in times of adversity. God's people – empowered to resist and overcome – can work with God to achieve liberating justice.

**Focus Scripture: Exodus 1:8—2:10**

Four centuries had passed since Jacob's family entered Egypt (Genesis 46). The Hebrews had become a significant ethnic group, living free, settled, and prosperous lives in the fertile delta region of Egypt. Like Joseph, they gained power by trading. God's promise to Abraham of a people who would be a source of blessing to other nations was moving towards fulfillment (Genesis 12:1–3, 15:5).

Then a new dynasty of pharaohs – kings – came to power in Egypt. Pharaoh was ignorant of Joseph's leadership during severe drought, which had enabled Egypt to emerge a wealthy regional power (Genesis 47:13–26). Rather, Pharaoh noted the Hebrews' prosperity and power, and feared these resident aliens threatened the dynasty's security.

Thus, the Hebrews were forced to serve Pharaoh, who tried three control tactics. First, there was enforced and severe hard labour, but such oppression did not retard the growth of the Hebrew community. Second, Pharaoh tried enforced infanticide, but Hebrew midwives – including Shiphrah and Puah – resisted and preserved life. Third, Pharaoh ordered the Egyptians to kill Hebrew children.

God knew of the Hebrews' misery, and responded. A brave Hebrew mother and her daughter Miriam (Exodus 15:20), together with Pharaoh's daughter, saved and raised Moses. Exodus 2:10 explains that Moses is so named because he was "drawn out" of water, which can be a metaphor for chaos in the Hebrew Scriptures. Later, Moses would be crucial to Israel's delivery from slavery. Pharaoh's word killed. His daughter's word granted life.

The storyteller in Exodus casts Pharaoh as anxious to gain control. From the Hebrews' perspective, the experience was one of claiming God's sovereignty and their destiny. Egypt's gods were pitted against

Moses and the God of the Hebrews. They could see God's purpose in images of a multiplying population, the midwives' faith, and Miriam's action.

Hebrew women and Pharaoh's daughter were crucial in fulfilling God's promise to Abraham. They secured a future for Israel, and modelled virtues of courage, resistance, loyalty, and faithfulness – virtues critical to Israel's character as a nation. These courageous women chose to serve God, subverting Pharaoh's plans. Pharaoh used political power, social policy, and prejudice. God used the awesome powers of nature and courageous, resourceful women.

Much later, when the Hebrew people were in exile in Babylon, the Exodus story helped them to identify their oppression with that of their ancestors. Perhaps the stories of the women's courage helped them endure, reassured that God's faithfulness could be trusted.

God still stands with and on behalf of the most vulnerable people. In **Psalm 124**, the psalmist describes God's salvation as like being freed from a trap.

Paul, in **Romans 12:1–8**, claims that a worshipful disposition, humility, and God's gifts empower us to discern and live God's way. In **Matthew 16:13–20** we hear Peter's confession that Jesus is God's liberating leader – the Messiah, the one who embodies God's law with compassion and care. Jesus gives authority to the disciples to do the same.



When people call out for justice, God hears and responds, often through the hearts and hands of God's people. There are still "pharaohs" who oppress and enslave. Who might they be? Who today is living in situations that threaten to destroy? How might we join them in overcoming such oppression?

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