



Bible Study

EXODUS 1:15-21



Canadian Lutheran
World Relief

CLWR BIBLE STUDIES

CLWR's Bible Studies have been designed to help congregations delve deeper into the challenges leading to injustices around the world, to explore related Bible stories, to discuss how these connect and how God calls us to act together.

These studies are meant to be adapted for your congregation's needs and are free to use. Each study includes discussion questions for children to adults, as well as suggestions to connect this discussion to action.

As CLWR continues to grow our resource collection, we would love to hear suggestions and insight from you. Please feel free to contact Heidi Van Schaik, our Church Relations Manager at heidi@clwr.org with ideas and feedback.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Exodus is part of the Torah/Pentateuch (Hebrew scriptures).
- The book of Exodus is a mish mash of traditions that have been crafted together from various periods in the life of Israel.
- It is a combination of narrative and law genres.
- It is important to remember that this is not a historical narrative but rather written by people of faith who wanted to share that faith with others.
- The literature was originally passed through an oral tradition and subsequently written, redacted, translated, redacted, translated again before we find the stories in our modern Bible.
- This doesn't mean that it's simply fiction, but rather personal accounts of faith in God shared over time to be passed on.
- Just because it isn't historical fact doesn't mean it has no value. In fact, sacred story is often what defines our behaviours, traditions, and understanding of God, faith, and our relationship to both.
- Traditionally, the writing is attributed to Moses, but modern scholarship is skeptical of believing this work to have been written and shaped over many centuries by a number of unknown story tellers and authors.
- The book is subdivided into 3 units:
 - 1: Israel and Egypt (chapters 1-15:2)
 - 2: Sinai and Covenant (chapters 15:22 – 24)
 - 3: Sanctuary and New Covenant (chapters 25 – 40)
- Exodus is often recounted and the most important scripture of the Hebrew Bible as it introduces and explains God's name as well as the central ideas about God (i.e. how God responds to and saves people who are suffering and/or oppressed).
- This writing is considered to be a clear and excellent example of a liberation story that brings hope to many.
- When reading the Book, pay special attention to patterns, repetition of words, and phrases to help in understanding the themes.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

- The ancient Egyptian community was polytheistic, boasting obedience, and praying to over 1500 known gods and deities.
- Remember the story of Jacob and all his sons and how they came to Egypt? (Joseph and his brothers of the Joseph and the Technicolored Dream Coat) this is the time era immediately preceding Moses' birth.
- A new king comes to power, one who doesn't know Joseph (see Ex. 1:8) and takes exception to the fact that the Israelite population is growing in spite of the oppression they are living under and are perceived to be becoming a threat to his power.
- The Egyptians begin to fear the power of the Israelites.
- In Exodus, God works through five women who display creative disobedience to their Pharaoh, ultimately saving Israel through Moses.

SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

- The story we focus on in this study is one of how two Hebrew midwives trick the king of Egypt, furthering the sacred story of Moses (he being the one who they ultimately save).
- We believe the midwives are Hebrew by the names we are offered: Shiphra and Puah are considered to be Hebrew names not Egyptian, Shiphrah meaning beauty or fair one, and Puah meaning splendour, splendid one.
- This story is rooted in a creation theology.
- The midwives "ethic of defenceless resistance" is rooted in the understanding of God's creative work.
- The women in this story are in positions of influence – they aren't leaders but are still powerful as they deal in life and death.
- The midwives display a fear of and trust in God and understand that human life is sacred.

Exodus 1:15–21

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 son, kill him, but if it is a daughter, 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.

Read Exodus 1:15-21

Why might the king have asked the midwives to kill the male infants?

- The king wanted the midwives to kill the male children because it seemed that the forced labour the adult population endured, didn't deplete the Israelite population and this attempt at infanticide was a sure way to control the ever-expanding masses and threat of the Israelites to his power.

How did the midwives respond?

- They make up a story about how they are always too late to the birth.

Why do you think the midwives said these things to the king?

- Their fear of God.
- Their faith.

What do you think the women risked by not following the orders of the King?

What was the result of the women refusing to do what the king asked?

- God gave them families.
- The king found someone else to throw all baby boys in the river.

STUDY (CONTINUED)

Can you think of modern stories of people choosing an “ethic of defenceless resistance” in modern history?

- Share with your group.

Can you think of a time when you faced a hard choice, and chose an “ethic of defenceless resistance”?

- Share with your group if you are comfortable.

If you have a birth story, share it as you feel comfortable. (if it is the story of a family member or friend, be sure you have permission to share).

- *Was it easy? Difficult? Challenging? What resources were accessible to help with any medical attention that was needed?*

Did You Know:

- Sunday May 5 is International Day of the Midwife. [i]
- The World Health Organization describes midwifery as “skilled, knowledgeable and compassionate care for childbearing women, newborn infants and families across the continuum from pre-pregnancy, pregnancy, birth, postpartum and the early weeks of life.” The evidence shows us that midwifery plays a “vital” role, and, when provided by educated, trained, regulated, licensed midwives, is associated with improved quality of care and rapid and sustained reductions in maternal and newborn mortality. [ii]
- Many in Canada are choosing to give birth using a midwife rather than in a hospital setting. We are fortunate to have that choice as many women, particularly those fleeing violence or disaster, or those who are in developing countries don’t have an option – midwifery is the norm.
- Giving birth continues to be a dangerous event for so many women around the world.
 - Every day in 2020, almost 800 women died from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.
 - A maternal death occurred almost every two minutes in 2020.
 - Almost 95% of all maternal deaths occurred in low and lower middle-income countries in 2020.
 - Care by skilled health professionals before, during and after childbirth can save the lives of women and newborns. [iii]

1. <https://www.rcm.org.uk/international-day-of-the-midwife-2024/#:~:text=On%20Sunday%20May%20midwives,Day%20of%20the%20Midwife%202024>. April 12, 2024

2. <https://www.who.int/teams/maternal-newborn-child-adolescent-health-and-ageing/maternal-health/midwifery> April 12, 2024

3. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality> April 12, 2024

WONDERINGS

Consider your local community, who might be facing maternal health challenges in your community?

Consider Canada, who might be facing maternal health challenges in this country?

Consider the world, what factors might contribute to maternal health challenges globally?

ACTION BRAINSTORM

How can you/your parish support maternal health locally?

How can you/your parish support maternal health nationally?

How can you/your parish support maternal health globally?

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

Offer space to a local health unit to offer maternal health and wellness opportunities, birthing classes, etc.

Partner with your local organizations that offer support for new mothers. Collect newborn and/or postpartum items for delivery..

Connect with your local food bank and offer a special collection for baby food, formula, and diapers.

Host a baby shower and collect items needed by local organizations for new mothers and their babies.

Care for the new mothers in your congregation by offering a baby shower, or a meal delivery program for the first month after birth.

On the International Day of the Midwife, take up a special collection at your worship service of newborn diapers. See how big a structure you can build with the boxes before delivering them to local organizations.

Knit or crochet caps, preemie caps, preemie vests for your local hospital (check to make sure they will accept them first).

- <https://www.babycrochetdesigns.com/free-preemie-patterns>
- https://www.allfreeknitting.com/Baby-Sets/Premature-Baby-Sets#google_vignette

ACTION SUGGESTIONS (CONTINUED)

The International Confederation of Midwives has lots of resources to read, to share, and to help plan events to commemorate the International Day of the Midwife on their website:

- <https://internationalmidwives.org/resources/idm-2024-toolkit/>

Find out who are the people in your community who support safe and healthy birth, and offer a special tribute to them on Sunday, May 5. Plan a special service to thank them for their dedication to the sacredness of human life.

Support CLWR by:

- Hosting an event (a meal, a plant sale, a concert, a baby shower, etc.) with financial proceeds going towards supporting their vision and mission to be partners with God in creating a safe and healthy environment for all of God's people.
- Offering an infant hygiene kit through CLWR to support newborns as they and their mothers flee disaster or conflict:
 - <https://www.clwr.org/product/C1F44CEI/infant-hygiene-kit>
- Offering pregnancy care to young mothers:
 - <https://www.clwr.org/product/4.71D4A2/pregnancy-care>

Ask children if they have ever seen a brand-new baby (some may have younger siblings, maybe there is a new baby in the parish).

Ask: “Did you know that babies are miracles?”

Explain that it takes a lot of things to go just right for a new baby to be born.

Explain that here in Canada we have lots of help – doctors, nurses, midwives, doulas, coaches, etc. – to make sure that babies are born healthy and that there are also many other people that help to make sure that new moms get enough rest, and that new babies get all the things they need.

Explain that we are very lucky to have those people to look out for new moms and their babies.

Explain that there are places in the world that don’t have the same resources and or families that don’t have people to help look after new moms and babies.

Share that God invites us to help look after all of God’s miracles in every way we can.

Ask: “How can we help to make sure that new moms and babies can stay healthy?”

- For example:
 - Letting them (mom and baby) rest.
 - Offering to get things like toys or diapers or blankets.
 - Watching over the new babies to make sure they are safe.

PRAYER

Creator God,

We give you thanks for all of the miracles you provide to us.
We give you thanks for the gift of parents and the gift of new life.

We give you thanks for all of the people in this world
that give of themselves to ensure that new moms and babies
have the best care to keep them healthy.

Bless all those who work to care for those in the birth process.

Bless all those who are expecting a new baby
and bless each and every new child born into your amazing world.

Amen.