

So, when Pharaoh tells them to kill the babies, the midwives quietly refuse; they simply won't do it. It is hard to overestimate the importance of these women saying "no" to injustice; and when their quiet protest gets noticed, they are summoned to explain their actions. They feed the Pharaoh a cockamamie story about the Hebrew women not being like Egyptian women: "The Hebrew women...are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them" (Exodus 1:19), meaning there is no time to kill the child. Surprisingly, Pharaoh believes them and lets them go! Pharaoh doesn't notice the quiet, *faithful courage* of these midwives until it's too late; but there are more courageous women to come!

Jochebed is the baby's mother (see Exodus 6:20; Numbers 26:59). Her courage looks different. She hides her baby for as long as she can, keeping hope alive in a world determined to extinguish it. When she can hide the child no longer, she places him in a basket sealed "with bitumen and pitch" (Exodus 2:3) and lays him gently among the reeds of the Nile. This is courage wrapped in heartbreak because she can't protect her son, but she also can't give him up. So, she entrusts him to God in the only way she knows. Sometimes courage looks like planning; at other times it looks like resistance or maybe even surrender. Jochebed's *yielding courage* embodies the Quaker mantra: "Ours is not to complete the task; neither may we lay it down."

There is *Miriam*, the baby's sister, whose courage is the *courage of presence*. She cannot control the river or stop the current. She cannot fight the crocodiles or Pharaoh's guards; but she can watch, stay close, and step forward when the moment comes. Courage does not always roar; sometimes it simply refuses to go away. Miriam's courage at the river becomes the courage she shows throughout her life as a prophet who lifts the first song of the redeemed at the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20-21), and as she is named a co-leader by God alongside her brothers Moses and Aaron. Miriam teaches us that courage begins when we show up, to watch and to wait, and to step forward when necessary. Presence can be the most powerful form of courage God asks of us.

Finally, we meet the nameless daughter of the Pharaoh. Strolling by the Nile, she spots a basket bobbing in the reeds. She finds a crying baby and instantly realizes two things: (1) this child is Hebrew, and (2) her father (the Pharaoh) is *not* going to like this. The princess lifts the infant out of the basket and comforts him, giving him the name, "Moses," because "I drew him out of the water" (Exodus 2:10). She raises him and provides for his education, inadvertently preparing him to stand before Pharaoh and demand that he let God's people go. While Pharaoh is busy issuing decrees, his daughter is busy breaking them, outmaneuvering Pharaoh by bringing home the very baby he wants to eliminate. Her *compassionate courage* reminds us that sometimes God's great rescue plan begins with the

person who steps up, speaks up, or does the right thing, even against the wishes or advice of friends and family, or the cultural spirit of the age.

So, these small, individual acts of courage begin to unravel great systems of oppression. The midwives don't topple Pharaoh. The mother doesn't change the law. The sister doesn't sway hearts and minds. The princess doesn't rewrite imperial policy. None of them hold any legal power, yet each in her own quiet way, resists the cruelty around her; and that courage, taken together, becomes subversive and contagious. Those small decisions create cracks in the armor of the empire until Pharaoh's plans collapse under the weight of ordinary women choosing to do what's right. So often, we feel powerless in the face of political turmoil, economic anxiety, or cultural division; but these courageous influencers remind us that justice rarely begins with grand gestures. Justice begins with small, faithful, compassionate acts by ordinary people who refuse to surrender their humanity to the tyranny of the powerful.

The heart of the Exodus story is this: *The kingdom of God rests in the hands of people who never see the future they make possible*. Shiprah and Puah deliver infants into the world without ever learning what becomes of them. Jochebed releases her child into a basket with no guarantee she will ever see him again. Miriam stands watch long before she becomes a prophet singing songs of deliverance. Pharaoh's daughter lifts a crying baby from the river without the slightest idea that he will one day challenge her father's power and help to liberate the Hebrew slaves. None of them know what their actions set in motion; but God knows. Their choices become the threads God uses to weave a future none of them could predict.

When you think about it, most of what we do for God feels small and meaningless. Most of our days feel very, very ordinary. The best parts of our faithfulness rarely make headlines; they often aren't even noticed. Yet, Scripture insists, quietly and consistently, that God works through the small, the ordinary, the routine, the everyday, and the faithful. The apostle Paul suggests that such ordinary faithfulness is conducive to the emerging reign of God, writing: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth....For we are God's coworkers, working together; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:6-9).

We might call this the "Theology of Little Things." Think of the servant girl in Naaman's household who suggested a way to heal the general's disease (2 Kings 5:2-5). Think of the nameless mother who packed her son a lunch of five loaves and two fish that Jesus used to feed thousands (John 6:1-14). Think of Rahab who quietly saved the Hebrew spies and

aided the Hebrew people’s conquest of Canaan (Joshua 2:1-14). Think of Mary, defying convention and saying, “Yes,” when God called her to bear a son. Scripture is replete with stories of ordinary people doing ordinary things that have extraordinary consequences.

Ordinary faithfulness involves perseverance: “So let us not grow weary of doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up,” Paul writes (Galatians 6:9). If we judge our lives by visibility or recognition, we will feel we haven’t done enough; but if we measure life by faithfulness, by quiet choices made in love, then we begin to see our lives the way God sees them: essential, meaningful, and woven into God’s larger purpose. Exodus 1–2 is more than just the preface to Moses’ story; it is a declaration about how God chooses to work: not through kings or armies or institutions, but with midwives, mothers, sisters, and the occasional princess who all defy an empire’s brutality.

Our culture measures influence in clicks, followers, platforms, and viral moments; our significance tallied by how many people notice us. Exodus has its influencers; but the text invites us into a deeper, quieter truth that real influence, the kind that reshapes futures and disrupts injustice, rarely begins with the people at the center of the stage. Rather, it begins in the wings with those whose names are spoken softly or not spoken at all, with people whose courage is unnoticed but not unseen by God.

This is the way God still works, through quiet courage and steady kindness; through people who don’t feel powerful, but who show up anyway. Ordinary faithfulness may not look like much in the moment, but Scripture assures us that in the hands of our God ordinary faithfulness is how everything changes! We are influencers, too. Jesus calls us to be salt of the earth and light to the world, seasoning and shining not on algorithms, trends, or markets, but on the emerging reign of God. The world may never know our names, but heaven does; and heaven rejoices in the quiet courage of people just like us.

Prayer: Lord God, grant us the deep reverence for Your name that Shiphrah and Puah held. Help us fear You more than we fear the pressures, demands, or threats of the world. Give us the quiet and resilient heart to stand firm when injustice commands our compliance. May Your Spirit guide our words and actions to protect the vulnerable; to navigate broken systems with grace, discernment, and unwavering integrity. Give us strength to do what is right, even when done in secret or against the grain. Multiply our small acts of obedience into a legacy of hope for generations to come. In your Holy name, we pray. Amen.

Sources

- Anderson, Kelley Cours. “Why people trust influencers more than brands – and what that means for the future of marketing.” *The Conversation*, theconversation.com, November 17, 2025. Retrieved December 24, 2025.
- Florence, Anna Carter. “The Girls in the Reeds.” Day1.org, January 31, 2016. Retrieved January 6, 2026.
- Leuchter, Mark, Rabbi Zev Farber. “Pre-Biblical Aaron, Miriam, and Moses.” Thetorah.com, no date. Retrieved January 6, 2026.

Early Hebrew Influencers

Sunday, August 23, 2026

Exodus 1:8–2:10

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

History books put kings and generals on the front page, presidents and prime ministers in bold headlines, and CEOs and influencers in glossy profiles. History doesn’t pay too much attention to midwives; but maybe it should. Shiphrah and Puah don’t want the limelight; there is nothing viral, glamorous, or trending about their work. Attention is the last thing they want because there is a baby with a target on his bottom, and it is the self-appointed task of these midwives to make sure he makes it to his first birthday. This story in Exodus demonstrates that God’s greatest work starts not with the powerful, but with the faithful.

As the story opens, Pharaoh is afraid. The Israelites are growing in number, and Pharaoh is uneasy with this large foreign population within his borders. Insecurity always seeks control, so Pharaoh enslaves the Hebrew people, using policy to enforce cruelty; and when oppression fails to shrink the population, he escalates to genocide. The people cry out to God for deliverance, and God responds. God does not deliver the people by raising a competing king or by matching Pharaoh’s power with more power. God does not send an army, a miracle, or a prophet (at least not yet). Instead, God begins with two midwives, a mother hiding a newborn, a watchful sister, and a soft-hearted princess.

The surprising theological claim of Exodus is that *salvation begins in the places we often overlook*. Salvation is birthed on the edges of public life, among people who have no voice, no vote, and no visibility. Pharaoh assumes that change begins with power; Exodus proves otherwise. The future of God’s people is secured by women standing quietly in the shadows, reminding us that God works in unexpected ways. Like the birth of another baby centuries later in Bethlehem, this child’s life begins among marginalized, humble people.

Pharaoh issues a terrible decree that male Hebrew infants must be killed; but Pharaoh doesn’t count on ordinary people showing up to thwart his plans. Enter the two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, a seemingly powerless duo with no endorsements, legal protection, or allies in high places. What they do have is courage: it’s not loud or dramatic, but it is faithful. The text says they “feared God” (Exodus 1:17). It’s not that God scared them or terrorized them; it is simply that they put their faith and their trust in God. Their loyalty wasn’t for sale. Their conscience wasn’t for rent. Their obedience belonged to God, not Pharaoh, echoing what the apostle Peter would say: “We must obey God rather than human beings” (Acts 5:29).