

# Ethical Implications of Deceit in Religious Narratives

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the ethical dimensions of divine deception through a case study of the biblical story of Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1. It zeroes in on the moral dilemma faced by the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah from Exodus, who courageously defied Pharaoh's directive to kill newborn boys. The narrative pits faith against ethics and deception against a higher moral calling, then asks whether there is any justification for lying in the latter's execution. The midwives' story is an object lesson in examining big-picture moral philosophy, e.g., providentialism, cross-temporal differences, or the intersection of civil disobedience and laws regarding a whistleblower concept (the ethical practice of revealing information that is believed to be evidence of wrongdoing). This mirrors the moral quandary when the authority conflicts with the moral code. By conducting contextual, interpretive, and semantic analysis, the thesis highlights the depth of the midwives' actions and the lessons they hold for current ethical conundrums, like the ethics of civil disobedience and the moral significance of whistleblowing. It raises the question of how spirituality informs decision-making today. No matter how one interprets the moral standing behind the midwives' decisions, the paper ultimately asserts that this is a central parable with a potent allegory about the moral crossroads one faces between justice, mercy, and supporting oppression. It ends with the lesson that deception is not a means to an end and that God does not support deception in reaching something higher. The midwives were praised for fearing God, not for lying.

**Keywords:** Deceit, Truthfulness, Exodus 1:15-22.

## INTRODUCTION

Religion, as a phenomenon, has always involved questioning the existence of a relationship between faith and ethics throughout the ages by scholars, philosophers, and practitioners alike. One of the most potent stories dealing with this cross is in the book of Exodus, which narrates the story of the Hebrew midwives who disobeyed Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.<sup>[1]</sup>

In the context of the book of Exodus, their actions are relevant to our study of ethics and religion. Fearing that the Pharaoh would kill male Hebrew infants to prevent Hebrews from outnumbering Egyptians, the midwives—Shiphrah and Puah—obeyed the Pharaoh but then defied him by not killing Hebrew baby boys but rather telling the Pharaoh that the Hebrew women were dying in childbirth. Of particular ethical concern within the framework of this piece is the theme of lying, the motive behind human actions, and the general theme of providentialism.

The midwives' actions in saving innocent babies landed them blessings for their fear of God.<sup>[2]</sup> This narrative raises questions about whether any situation can ever be justified if a person reaches for deceit, for example, to overthrow a dictatorship. The ethical considerations of this question, as raised by the midwives' narrative, are not just historical but remain topical and similar to modern social justice problems, civil disobedience, and the actions of people who endanger their lives to save others.

The midwives' story is a powerful allegory for contemporary ethical dilemmas, such as whistleblowing or civil disobedience, where individuals must weigh their duty to authority against their moral duty to protect

others. By drawing parallels between the midwives' stories and modern ethical dilemmas, this paper aims to demonstrate the enduring relevance of ancient narratives in guiding ethical decision-making in the present day.

This paper will delve into the intricate ethical dilemmas that often arise when a person is torn between their duty to their superiors and their duty to do what is right according to biblical standards. Doing so aims to provide a deeper understanding of the moral complexities, stimulating intellectual curiosity and engagement in the audience.

Furthermore, the midwives' story provides a 'mise en abime,' a literary term referring to a story within a story, of other motifs in the scriptures, such as the motifs of the entire Bible: liberation, justice, and mercy. This paper contextualizes these archaic stories within the parameters and principles of moral philosophy, demonstrating how similar narratives can elucidate the modern ways audiences can engage with contemporary ethical controversies such as whistleblowing, humanitarian intervention, etc.

In this endeavor, in addition to attempting to demystify the distinction between lying, one's intention, and an act of God as portrayed in scriptures, we will strive to invite a richer and more expansive public discourse about how spirituality can undergird decision-making in the modern world. Altogether, the story described the actions of the Hebrew midwives as an attempt to perceive justice and moral truth amidst evil during the journey through life.

The pericope under consideration details the story of the midwives disobeying Pharaoh's order to kill the babies yet to be born and seemingly being commended for it. There has been a divide as to the morality of the midwives' response to the Pharaoh's order to kill the babies. This paper aims to dig into the messy lying world within a life-or-death framework. The midwives risked their lives protecting the babies. Were their actions laudable? Does the end justify the means?

This paper will provide an interpretive and semantic analysis of the pericope related to lying in defense of saving a life. This research effort is not just about untangling messy interpretations but about engaging with the profound meaning of lying, considering various perspectives regarding whether we should lie to address ethical concerns. By stressing the importance of the paper's analysis, it aims to make the audience feel the significance of the research effort.

While some argue that God blessed the midwives for their deceit in protecting the male children against the king of Egypt's order to kill them, others say that this was not the case. [3] A critical exegetical study is essential to consider the textual evidence within the midwives' statements and thus respond to the question: Does God use deceit to achieve His purposes? [4]

Three distinct steps help us discover the purpose of the midwives' blessings. First, a contextual analysis offers the historical background, setting, and literary structure: What events led up to the texts under consideration? Second, the interpretive analysis provides a grammatical study and syntax of critical vital words and clauses. Third, the semantic analysis provides intertextuality and ends with the ethical implications of using deceit to achieve one's purpose.

## EXEGESIS OF EXODUS 1:15-22

### II.1. Contextual Analysis

#### II.1.a. Hebrew Text:

h'[(WP tynlB Veh; ~veiw> hr'êp.vi 'tx;a;h'( ~veÛ rv,'a] tYO=rIb.[ih'( tdoβL.y:m.l;( ~yIr;êc.mi %l,m,ä  
'rm,aYO'w: 15

‘hy"x")w" ayhiP tB;î~aiw> Atêao !T<âmih]w: ‘aWh !BEï~ai ~yIn"+b.a'h'-l[; !t<Byair>W tAYërIb.[ih'(-ta, 'lk,d>L,y:B. rm,aYO©w: 16

~ydI(l'y>h;-ta, !"yY<Bx;T.w: ~yIr"+c.mi %l,m,ä !h<Bylea] rB<iDI rv<±a]K; Wfêl' al{âw> ~yhiël{a/h'ä-ta, 'tdoL.y:m.h;( !"ar,ÛyTiw: 17

~ydI(l'y>h;-ta, !"yY<Bx;T.w: hZ<+h; rb"âD'h; !t<Byfi[] [;WDim; !h,êl' rm,aYOæw: tdoêL.y:m.l;( 'yIr;'c.mi-%l,m,( arÛq.YIw: 18

Wdl'(y"w> td,L,Py:m.h; !h<±lea] aAbôT' ~r,j,'B. hN"heê tAyæx'-yKi( tYO=rIb.[ih'( tYOàrlc.Mih; ~yvi²N"K; al{ô yKiä h[oêr>P;-la, 'tdoL.y:m.h;( !"r>m:ÛaTow: 19

dao)m. Wmßc.[;Y:)w: ~[²h' br,YIôw: tdo+L.y:m.l;( ~yhiPl{a/ bj,yYEiw: 20

~yTi(B' ~h,Pl' f[;Y:ïw: ~yhi\_l{a/h'-ta, tdoßL.y:m.h;( Wair.y")-yKi( yhi§y>w: 21

s `!WY\*x;T. tB;Ph;-lk'w> Whkuêyliv.T; 'hr'ao'y>h; dAL^YIh; !BEâh;-IK' rmo=ale AMß[;-lk'l. h[oêr>P; wc;ây>w: 22

### II.1.b. Translation of Exodus 1:15-22:

15. The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiprah and the other Puah.

16. And he said to Shiprah and Puah, “When you help the Hebrew give birth upon the birth stool; if a son, you shall put to death, but if a daughter, she shall live.”

17. The midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded but caused the boys to live.

18. The king of Egypt called the midwives and said, “why have you done this thing and caused the boys to live?”

19. The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptians, they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives come to them."

20. God pleased the midwives, and the people became exceedingly mighty.

21. Because the midwives feared God, He made them households.

22. Pharaoh gave charge to all people, saying: every male child born, you shall throw in the Nile, but every daughter shall cause to live.

While some scholars<sup>[5]</sup> contest Moses' authorship of the Book of Exodus, others consider him its author.<sup>[6]</sup> Specific parts of the book are assigned to him, as, for example, he was to record the battle against the Amalekites in a book (chap. 17:14). Exodus 17:14, together with Num 33:2, points to the fact that Moses kept a diary in which he wrote the ordinances contained in Exod 20:21-23:33 and the book of the covenant in Exod 24:7.<sup>[7]</sup>

After the death of Joseph and his brothers, "the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty so that the land was filled with them" (Exod 1:7). Then, in those days, a new pharaoh emerged who did not know Joseph. The title of the book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible is the English word "names"; this term indicates a literary connection between Genesis and Exodus. It shows that the Israelites living in bondage had retained a knowledge of their ancestry and, with it, a knowledge of God's promise. As such, the Scriptures report, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years.<sup>[8]</sup> However, I will also judge the nation they will serve; afterward, they will come out with many possessions" (Gen 15:13-14).

In an attempt to thwart this prophecy, Exodus 1:1-11 describes the first stage of the Israelites' oppression. The first attempt to disrupt Israel's growth was the appointment of "taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor" (Exod 1:11). There seems to have been some concern regarding the rapid growth of the Israelites. "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel."<sup>[9]</sup> Verses 15-22 explain their prosperity as divine favor was upon them despite Pharaoh's attempts at controlling the population.<sup>[10]</sup>

There is a parallel structure between Exodus 1:1-14 and 2:1-10, and their relationship is general to specific. While the first section (Exodus 1:1-14) describes the sons of Israel and particularly the sons of Jacob, the second section (Exodus 2:1-10) narrows down to one family within the house of Levi. Further, it narrows down to one man—Moses. The pericope under consideration represents a plot that bridges these two sections.<sup>[11]</sup> Exodus 1:15-22 is written in a chiasmic pattern whose central theme is Pharaoh's attempted genocide.

A1 Pharaoh's directive to the midwives (vv. 15-16)

B1 the midwives' fear of God—civil disobedience (v. 17)

C the king's charge against the midwives and their response (vv. 18-19, 20)

B2 the midwives' fear of God—reward (v. 21)

A2 Pharaoh's command to all his people (v. 22)<sup>[12]</sup>

As the Israelites became more numerous, they presented a possible military threat to Egypt as well. Hence, in the pericope under consideration, to hinder the birth rate, the king turned to the Hebrew midwives, giving them specific instructions to kill the males born of the Hebrews.<sup>[13]</sup>

## EXEGETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Pharaoh gives directives to the midwives (vv. 15-16). The word for "midwife" is simply the feminine piel participle of the verb *dl;y*", "to give birth." Moses used the term "Hebrew" instead of the "Israelites" to refer to the midwives. This is consistent with the general pattern in the Old Testament when the Israelites are dealing with non-Israelites. People of other cultures tended to lump the Israelites together with other related ethnic groups and to refer to them by the more broadly generic term "Hebrew."<sup>[14]</sup> The clause (Hebrew midwives) may also be rendered "midwives of the Hebrews," meaning the midwives who attended to the Hebrew women.<sup>[15]</sup> Using the verb *rm, aYO'w*: in v. 15 connotes a command. The narrative opens with irony as two midwives outwit the king of all Egypt. The Egyptian community is parallel to two Hebrew midwives; once this irony is perceived, speculation as to how two midwives could service the entire Israelite community is beside the point.

Another irony is that the king of Egypt stooped down to converse with two lowly Hebrew women to move his intention forward. Shiphrah and Puah highlight that Pharaoh is unnamed while the two midwives are named.<sup>[16]</sup> The king, therefore, summoned the midwives to execute his orders. He expected obedience from them. The same verb *rm;a'* "speak, say" is also used at the beginning of v. 17, thus, perhaps to avoid redundancy (v. 16 uses 'said' instead of 'spoke'). The verb *rm;a'* used to describe the king's communication to the two midwives can mean "speak to" but also can mean "communicate to" or "give instruction for." Thus, In v. 16, the king passed instructions through the officials and summoned them directly in v. 18.<sup>[17]</sup> The use of *tdoßL.y:m.l*, "cause to bring forth") in v. 15 in the piel suggests that it was expected of the midwives to cause or help bring forth babies. Similarly, *!k,d>L.y:B.*, "cause to bring forth" in v. 16, the piel infinitive construct is an adverbial clause of time. This clause lays the foundation for the following verb, the Qal perfect with a vav consecutive, which means, "When you assist . . . then you will observe." The latter carries an instructional nuance (the imperfection of instruction), "you are to observe."<sup>[18]</sup> Upon hearing Pharaoh's instructions or

directives, the midwives disregarded Pharaoh's request. Another irony is that Pharaoh can get the Egyptian community to bend to his will but fails to get two midwives to respond to his command. [19]

The use of  $\text{!}^{\text{ar}} \hat{\text{U}}\text{yTi}w$  in v. 17 in the qal means "to fear, to be afraid, to stand in awe of, to be awed, to fear, to reverence, to honor, to respect"  $\text{!}^{\text{ar}} \hat{\text{U}}\text{yTi}w$ : as qal means "they feared." Thus, the 'they' translated in the verb referred to the midwives. The midwives feared God and did not carry out Pharaoh's command. Upon the king's request, they (the midwives) let the boys live.

For Douglas K. Stuart, the "Fear God" clause does not necessarily imply that they "believe in the true God of Israel." In the Pentateuch, "fear God" means "to be honest, faithful, trustworthy, upright, and, above all, religious." It does not mean being afraid of Him in general but of the consequences of disobeying Him. [20]

Contra Douglas, the SDA Bible Commentary, argues that the midwives were Hebrews, and consequently, they knew that God had forbidden murder. However, they might have yet to become acquainted with the words of the sixth commandment of the Decalogue. [21] This pericope climaxes with the king's charge against the midwives for non-compliance. The Hebrew verb  $\text{!}^{\text{y}}\text{Y} < \beta x$ ; T.w, piel vav consecutive imperfect third-person feminine plural often indicates a factitive nuance with stative verbs, showing the cause of the action. Here, it means, "Let live; cause to live." The verb is the exact opposite of Pharaoh's command for them to kill the boys as we see in the clause  $\text{!}^{\text{T}} < \hat{\text{a}}\text{mih}]w$ :  $\text{aWh !BEi} \sim \text{ai}$  in v. 16 where the verb  $\text{!}^{\text{T}} < \hat{\text{a}}\text{mih}]w$  in the Hiphil means "to kill, put to death or to bring to a premature death." [22]

Several years may have elapsed between the king's decree to the midwives in v. 16 and his angry summoning of the disobedient midwives as described in v. 18. In v. 18, the king summons the midwives to ask why the executive order was not carried out. The second verb in Pharaoh's speech is a preterit with a vav consecutive. It may indicate a simple sequence: "Why have you done . . . and (so that you) let live?" as introduced by the adverb  $[\text{; WD}\hat{\text{i}}m$ ; "why?" which reinforces Pharaoh's astonishment. Why have you caused the boys to live? On what account have you done so? [23] The context of this pericope suggests that Pharaoh's command envisioned a secretive killing of infants done by the midwives at birth.

The midwives' response in v. 19 that Hebrew women are vigorous is noteworthy. Were the midwives telling the truth or disregarding the king's command? According to Gesenius,  $\text{Wdl}'(\text{y}^{\text{w}} >$ , "and bring forth" in v. 19 is a perfect with vav consecutive, which serves as the apodosis to the preceding temporal clause; it has the frequentative nuance. [24] Gesenius's argument renders the midwives' statement that the Hebrew women gave birth before their arrival trustworthy. [25] To some extent, the answer hinges on the meaning of the hapax legomenon  $\text{hy} < x$ ' translated as "vigorous" (NAS), "lively" (KJV, JPS, NKJV). It is perhaps best translated as "more active" or "more involved." The midwives' response that "they . . . give birth before the midwives arrive" could be perfectly accurate since they were being subject to hard labor, as opposed to Egyptian women who were not as active and therefore had more challenges in their delivery. [26]

The point of this brief section is that the midwives respected God above the king. They simply followed a higher authority that prohibited killing. Fearing God is an essential part of true faith, which leads to an obedient course of action and the ability not to be terrified by worldly threats. There was enough truth in what they were saying to be believable. Still, they had no intention of honoring the king by participating in the murder, and they saw no reason to give him a straightforward answer. God honored their actions. In v. 20 the verb  $\text{bj, yYEi}w$ : is the Hiphil preterite of  $\text{bj; y}$ ". In this stem the word means "to do good to," "treat well," "treat kindly, graciously." The vav consecutive shows that the expression of God's grace was a result of their fearing and obeying him. It means "do good to," "to make things go well for." [27]

The temporal indicator  $\text{yhi} \text{\$y} > w$ : in v. 21 focuses on the causal clause and lays the foundation for the main clause, namely, "God made households for them." This is the second time the text affirms the reason for their defiance: their fear of God. In v. 21, because the midwives feared God, He made them households or families.

The force of the Hebrew word  $\sim \text{yTi}(\text{B}'$ , "house" suggests that God established their families; He made them fruitful. The king expresses his disappointment by involving all Egyptians in the genocide. Exodus 1:22 forms

a fitting climax to the pericope under consideration, in which the king continually seeks to eradicate the Israelite strength. At last, with this decree, he disregards any potential complication and orders the open massacre of Hebrew males. In v. 22, all Egyptians were expected to join in the killing of all Israelite newborn boys. The throwing of babies into the Nile River was probably because the pantheistic Egyptians viewed the Nile River as a god.[\[28\]](#)

A closer look at the literary structure above[\[29\]](#) indicates that while A1 and A2 point to Pharaoh's directives to the midwives and his officials, B1 and B2 emphasize the midwives' motives for letting the boys live—fear of God.

## SEMANTIC CONSIDERATIONS

Pharaoh's attempted genocide is best understood theologically as the midwives' challenge to him, as recorded in two separate statements (vv. 17, 21). "For their fear of God, these midwives were rewarded in that not only were they fruitful themselves, God also gave them families of their own,"[\[30\]](#) Hyatt argues that one possible reason why child-bearing may have been a special blessing to these midwives was the probability that barren women were regularly used as midwives. If so, he continues, their reward was that they became fertile and had their own families. The blessing of bearing children was not denied to the Hebrew women or midwives.[\[31\]](#)

An implicit moral imperative to "fear God" is suggested in these verses, especially in light of the use of the Hebrew expression "fear God" in v. 17. Moses used this expression six times in the Pentateuch[\[32\]](#). On each occasion, the fear of God helped provide the ground for the bestowed blessings. In Gen 22:12, Abraham feared God by not withholding his only son, so God provided a substitute lamb in his son's stead. Further, in 42:18, because of Joseph's fear of God, he did not harm his brothers, and he became a source of blessings for all his brothers. Two of the three occurrences in Exodus are from the pericope under consideration. In Exodus 1:17 and 21, the midwives' fear of God provided a channel for the blessings upon their families; God made them fruitful. In Exodus 18:21, upon Jethro's admonition, Moses was to select leaders of the people from among those who feared God. In Deut 25:18-19, Amalek's remembrance was to be blotted out because he did not fear God.

Outside the Pentateuch, the expression "fear God" occurs seven times in wisdom literature and the New Testament. In Job 1:1, Job was a man who was ~T' "complete" and feared God. In Ps 55:19, it is stated that God shall afflict those who do not fear Him, while in Ps 66:16, the Psalmist invites those who fear God to hear his testimony. Ecclesiastes 5:7 admonishes the fear of God amidst the vanities. In Eccl 8:12, 13, happiness is promised to those who fear God, while unhappiness is promised to those who do not fear Him. Traditionally seen as the author, Solomon concludes Ecclesiastes by recommending the fear of God and keeping the commandments.

In the New Testament, Luke 18:2-5 tells the story of the judge who neither fears God nor man but acknowledges that those who fear God shall receive justice. In 23:40, one of the thieves on the cross feared God. The apostle Paul, in Acts 13:16 and 26, addressed those who fear God as having salvation belonging to them. First, Peter 2:17 points to the characteristics of the chosen people as those who fear God. Revelation 14:7 points to the judgment as coming upon those who do not fear God.

All these "fear God" passages are connected by the reverence, faith, and trust in His ability to guide, protect, and save.

## ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF USING DECEIT TO ACHIEVE ONE'S PURPOSE

The questions of amorality and ethics regarding the elements of deception, specifically within the purpose of the divine, contribute to the creation of theological and moral controversies. A more intricate issue, even from a simple ethical system point of view, is deceit, traditionally described as immoral. The actions of the midwives

in Exodus 1:15-22 raise the following questions: Is it ever acceptable to lie if that lie is for the sake of truth? Is lying justified to cover the sins of the innocent?

In this text, Shiphrah and Puah are Hebrew midwives who refuse to kill Hebrew male babies as ordered by Pharaoh. This conclusion, given in the guise of the plausible fact that Hebrew women go into labor before the midwives get there, captures the ethical dilemma typical of the position of these midwives. In committing an act of killing in an attempt to protect themselves and their families, these women portray a moral choice that may owe allegiance to no unjust king but a God they fear. This scenario poses the need to understand Consequentialism,[\[33\]](#) especially the Doctrine of the Lesser Evil. Within the confines of this vision, one can hardly concentrate on the midwives' ethical breaches; instead, their lies were not the focal point, but their fear of God resulting in blessings.

Furthermore, the question of divine endorsement arises: Did not God bless the midwives by saving their lives to imply that deception is a legitimate way to achieve a goal? As such, Exodus 1:17 states that the midwives fear God motivated them to save the newborn babies. If the Lord qualifies those who deceive to vindicate the harmless, does this not mean that one can disregard human morality, especially cultural morality, where God is involved? How could God contradict his command about untruthfulness, deceit, or lying?

Further, the consequences of divine involvement in deception would question the character of God on a larger scale. Does God, who is a symbol of truth, justify here a kind of moral relativism that sometimes allows for lying? The analysis of such cases as the midwives highlights further the question that to be in the Bible, there is a certain kind of tendency when human falsehood is not coordinated with divine loyalty to basic standards of ethics even though the preservation of life and the fidelity to the word of God may be at stake.

Finally, considering these ethical considerations requires a sophisticated vision of morality within Biblical terms and constraints that acknowledge humanity's depth, paradoxes, and faithfulness to God in the face of the divine plan. As we consider the ethics of deception, theologians and faithful must assess the moral features governing these stories and their applicability to modern social dilemmas.

Indeed, it is necessary to discuss the difference between moral absolutism and moral relativism[\[34\]](#) when thinking about ethics within the scope of deceit in biblical stories. Moral absolutism gives the idea that there are right and wrong behaviors, which do not change with any circumstances. In contrast, moral relativism postulates that right and wrong depend on circumstances. By the actions of the midwives and their receiving God's blessings, they offer a situation where the concept of lying is seen as an immoral act, although that immoral act may have been necessary, in their judgment, to save one's life. However, the contextual, exegetical, and semantic analysis above shows that the reason for their blessings was their fear of God.

The fact that the midwives conveniently decide to lie to the Hebrew women is against the biblical mandate against deception. However, when they realized that the entire society was oppressive and women, in particular, were great losers in that society, they took matters into their own hands, although they owed loyalty to their king to be truthful. They thought it was better to disobey a tyrant and thereby lose one's life than to obey him and preserve it; the midwives here exemplify a form of opposition to oppression, which is consonant with the call to freedom that runs like a red thread throughout the Old Testament. This can be interpreted as a reminder of the call to justice, as the authors sometimes remind us that the right thing to do can, at times, involve rebellion against the powers that do wrong.

Also, it is essential to know that ethical issues correlated with those dilemmas work in any situation where people participate, such as whistleblowers,[\[35\]](#) refugees, or those who protect people from unjust laws and violence. For instance, the moral reasoning for telling a white lie, which is considered a vice, is typical where there are massive cases of social inequality or state repression. Like midwives, some people today are caught in a dilemma where good moral reasons pull in opposite directions, and human beings must be respected. Though, it may appear as if the end justifies the means.

Furthermore, analyzing the communicative actions that the midwives took regarding the perceived reasons—fear of God—also invokes a reference to a universal moral map. From this viewpoint, when human authorities prescribe sinful or unfair demands, one can only obey divine orders and do right by everyone. Divine command theory, which strongly argues that the source of morality is God's supreme authority, best complements the conflict between divine and human governance. Therefore, it is not a sin to give birth on the Sabbath. However, the midwives were instructed to fear and reverence God, thus making fear and reverence of God the critical tenet of interpreting ethical actions in emergent situations.

In addition, the themes of deception concerning the plan of the Lord promote intensive contemplation concerning the truth in the Scripture. These stories can tell the truth as facts and the meanings of the final ethical goals—safety, fairness, and kindness. In contrast with forcing the reader to become actuated by the misguided notion that truth has no value, these scriptural examples lead back to searching for a multi-layered understanding of truth, which might reject situational ethics and the book of Job that depicts divine justice.

Thus, admitting that God utilized deceit—both pedagogical and narrated—is ostensibly immoral and entails accepting an intricate polarity of moral principles, social parameters, and theological postulations. Before turning to the last aspects of the ethical analysis of lying given the divine purpose, we should consider the question of intention in ethical assessments. Therefore, intention occupies a central position in determining the moral balance of incidents considered by many as being fraudulent. While the midwives desire to save life, which is good, Pharaoh's desire to slaughter the male children is evil par excellence. It underlines that the assessment of actions should include determining the result and the motive that God's providence may override our actions.

The theological conversation that tries to explain God's participation in human lives also makes it easy to understand the concept of deceit. God is omniscient and sovereign; it appears at times that when human deceit has been employed for the divine purpose, questions regarding the relationship of God's holiness with actions that people ordinarily classify as sinful remain. God's lack of condemnation of evil acts should not be taken as a commendation of those evil acts.<sup>[36]</sup> The example of the midwives can prompt believers to consider the nature of divine providence: does God act according to human subjective moral standards, or does God act beyond human sinfulness when he occasionally chooses to ignore human sinful actions for a more excellent outcome? This kind of theological reflection opens up a paradigm where God's provision can overlook sinful acts, positing a model of divine sovereignty that encapsulates complicated ethical circumstances.

Furthermore, we must link these stories and their frameworks within the book and the rest of the scriptural literature. The Book of Exodus will remain one of the most valuable texts, revealing the message of freedom and God's help in the fight against the oppressors. To this end, the understanding of the choices made by the midwives in terms of liberation theology holds a justice-centered story that speaks of mercy and compassion, stressing that, at times, despite our sinfulness, God may still accomplish the right thing. The midwives are doing what will make a difference by walking directly into systemic evil and risking their lives; thus, their testimony responds to today's cry for social justice and civil disobedience in societies with unjust laws.

Lastly, these ethical concerns relate these narratives beyond the Bible and into contemporary society, setting up relevant points for understanding how the fear of God and ethical concerns intersect. It remains relevant in different present-day situations—war, oppression, and systemic wrongs to question when, if ever, it is permissible to lie to save lives. For example, decision-making involved in helping refugees or whistleblowers or, on the contrary, putting the interest of society over a specific family's concern is not only familiar to the world associated with the action of the texts but also belongs to the coordinator's contemporary reality.

Therefore, the ethics of God's lying have a complex discussion that may force the believers to think about many issues relating to truth-telling, intention, and sovereignty of God within the moral experiences of humanity. In a way, the stories of the midwives and comparable characters from the Old Testament should and can motivate people in search of ways to practice faith and balance one's actions given the essential values—love, mercy, justice, and the fear of God.



This paper discussed some of the critical ethical issues related to the actions of the Hebrew midwives as depicted in the Book of Exodus and see that these stories do more than depict historical events but are very useful for ethical discussions up to the present. Thus, when Shiphrah and Puah disobey Pharaoh's commandment and commit a sin, they encounter complex ethical dilemmas central to theological and ethical reflections.

In this discussion, the core principle is focused on the idea that the fear of God plays a vital role in God's moral judgment of the midwives' acts. The actions of the midwives above show how the fear of God suffice to overlook the repercussions of an unethical move. They represent countercultural attitudes of revolt against oppressive authority in favoring the value of life while rejecting compliance to the king's brutal order. This reflection does not neglect the earlier black-and-white either/or outlook to a pragmatic both/and where the higher good and the ethic of love and care provide a greater virtue than focusing on lying. However, it represents God overlooking human sinfulness to achieve His purpose without condoning evil acts.

In addition, the theme of civil disobedience and social justice is current in the storyline of The Midwives. People have faced similar moral dilemmas concerning the cost they have to pay individually for being against an unjust system. The actions of the whistleblowers, protesters, and those speaking out for the voiceless connect with the midwives' experiences, signifying that getting justice means operating in the legal ambiguous realities. This connection especially points to the call for justice and commitment to righteousness across generations, irrespective of how powerful the forces likely to oppose such courage are.

The more profound exploration of the Sovereignty of God also adds another dimension to the issue of deceit and ethics. When affirming God as the living and engaging in the affairs of humans, we come to terms with the fact that the Lord works in ways consistent with His character. [37] The midwives worked under the blade of the heavenly power, again proving that their fear of God granted them divine blessings. This relationship prompts essential questions about divine orchestration: Will God's sovereignty remove one from moral accountability, or will it amplify accountability by requiring a moral agent to be consistent with His moral character?

Finally, the educative connections drawn from the midwives' behaviors promote an ethics based on the belief in God to do justice and care about the well-being of others. This talent is of tremendous significance in the present-day environment, which is becoming increasingly multifaceted, and people are often found in situations when the decision-making solution has no definitive answer. As much as society is challenged by issues such as racism and ecological justice, the Hebrew midwives' stories remind people that solid commitment to siding with the oppressed and the marginalized will always call for courageous persons to stand up to protect Human dignity, among others.

This final part shows that the story of the Hebrew midwives is not only a historical story but a lively message for today. It calls the moderns to reflect and improve their ability to discern in the rich context of faith-imbued ethics.

## CONCLUSIONS

The narrative of the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, offers a powerful case study for walking the fine line between faith, ethics, and what was morally right. Their fearless defiance of Pharaoh's orders also offers insight into the depth of ethical complexities that individuals face when they are forced to choose between obedience to authority and heeding a higher moral imperative. So viewed as a God of justice and mercy, one through which we may consider not only possible nuances and complications inherent in their actions but what such those might ever say globally and locally for reasons championing justice, mercy, and learning.

The story of the midwives dueling with guilt encourages the reader to ponder the morality of lying about what society views as a life-or-death decision and whether the end justifies the means. Their story mythologizes their rebellion, which is how we can make sense of it while scrolling through pictures of what we were doing

while their homes burned to the ground, defiant of their authority your citizens penned beneath protest signs we held up behind them.

This paper prompts reflection about how we can traverse the moral terrains, or 'dilemmas,' we find ourselves in through engaging with the ethical stakes inherent in the midwives' actions. Their legacy raises these questions about our spiritual and ethical frameworks for decision-making and challenges us to find out what role faith and the fear of God can play in our response to injustice.

As we noted, Shiphrah and Puah remind us that if mercy and life are our goals in the face of tyrants, we may have to do things that we would never else do that will urge us to be in harmony with our most significant values. So, moving forward with the teachings of this ageless story, we are reminded of the everlasting thirst for peace, fairness, equity, and justice.

Finally, while Some have argued that God blessed the midwives for their deceit, contextual, exegetical, and semantic analysis have yielded no textual evidence that this was the case. On the contrary, the textual evidence supports that their fear of God blessed them. The paper strongly concludes and recommends that Scripture condone the end, justifying the means under no circumstance.

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## FOOTNOTES

[1] See Exod 1:17.

[2] This will be expanded in the exegetical section below.

[3] Gregory H. Harris, "Does God Deceive? The Deluding Influence of Second Thessalonians 2:11," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 16, no. 1 (2005): 73-93. According to Rodney L. Bassett, a scriptural approach to lying suggests that, although generally unacceptable, lying may be justified to gain understanding and, under certain limiting conditions, deception may be an acceptable methodology for Christian researchers. See more of his arguments in Rodney L. Bassett, "Lying in the Laboratory: Deception in Human Research from Psychological, Philosophical, and Theological Perspectives," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 34 (December 1992): 201-12. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 126

[4] Tchamba, A. (2012). God and Integrity: A Case Study of Walter C. Kaiser Jr. And Norman L. Geisler. <https://core.ac.uk/download/232862928.pdf>, 161.

[5] Donald W. Wicke, "The Literary Structure of Exodus 1:2-2:10," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (JSOT) 7, no. 24 (1982): 99-107, has suggested that several redactors put the book together; John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (1987), 10, has indicated that Elohist authors authored some sections of Exodus. See J. P. Hyatt, *Commentary on Exodus*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1971), 56; Noth has posited that vv. 15-22 is a fragment of the Elohist. M. Noth, *Exodus*, The Old Testament Library, trans. J. S. Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 23.

[6] Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 2:28. See also Ronald E. Clements, *Exodus*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary: New English Bible 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 2.

[7] "The Second Book of Moses Called Exodus," *SDABC*, 1:491.

[8] Tchamba, A. (2012), 163.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] See Wicke, "Exodus 1:2-2:10," 99-107.

[11] *Ibid.*, 101.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] This escape explains the meaning of the word "exodus," which means "exit or going out." See Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Exodus, The," *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 700.

[14] J. Lewy, "Origin and Signification of the Biblical Term 'Hebrew'," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957): 1-13; J. Bottero, *Le probleme des Habiru a la 4e rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, Cahiers de la societe Asiatique 12 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1954), quoted in Stuart, *Exodus*, 78.

[15] "Exodus 1:15," *SDABC*, 1:498; see also John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus* (Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press, 2000), 1:51.

[16] In Hebrew, Shiphrah means "beauty" or "fair one." The name has been preserved in a list of Egyptian slaves of the eighteenth-century BC. Puah has no obvious etymology, but it is usually taken to mean

“splendour” or “splendid one.” See more in W. F. Albright, “Northwest-Semitic Names in a List of Egyptian Slaves from the Eighteenth Century BC,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 74, no. 4 (1954): 229.

[17]Stuart, *Exodus*, 78.

[18]Holladay, *HALOT*, s.v. “rm;a’,” “!k,d>L,y:B.”

[19]Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation*, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 31.

[20]Stuart, *Exodus*, 79.

[21]“The Book of Exodus,” *SDABC*, 1:499.

[22]Holladay, *HALOT*, “!yY<βx;T.w:.”

[23]Ibid., 396, 551. See also N. Lemche, “‘Hebrew’ as a National Name for Israel,” *Studia Theologica* 33 (1979): 1-23.

[24]Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed., ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 337-338.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Stuart, *Exodus*, 82.

[27]Holladay, *HALOT*, “bj;y.”

[28]On the Egyptian pantheistic religion that made the Nile as a god, see the excellent description by Henri Frankfort in *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation* (1948; repr., New York: Harper and Row, 1961); Henri Frankfort, Henriette A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, John Albert Wilson, and Thorkild Jacobsen, *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967) initially was published with the title, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1946). See also W. LaSor, “The Nile,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. Ed., ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 3:536-537.

[29] See p. 5 above.

[30]Hyatt, *Exodus*, 61.

[31]Ibid.

[32]See Gen 22:12; 42:18; Exod 1:17, 21; 18:21; Deut 25:18. Especially helpful is Gen 20:11, where Abraham is afraid to be in Gerar because “there is no fear of God in the place,” that is, the place is lawless, immoral, and unrighteous. See Stuart, *Exodus*, 83.

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[37] Blakely, Given O. *God's Everlasting Kingdom: The Kingdom Where Rule is Right*. Xlibris Corporation, 2008, 178.