

The Pharaoh's Daughter
Bible Study—Week #2

(Please feel free to print this material and write your answers in the spaces provided.)

Look What I Found—Mered's Steadfast Heart

Biblical novels give us a chance to meet folks we might not otherwise notice if a deeper story hadn't been researched and written. Mered is one of those biblical characters. Lost in a long genealogy of the Tribe of Judah, Mered's name appears in 1 Chronicles 4 as a son, husband, and father, but we know little else about him.

In *The Pharaoh's Daughter*, Mered is cast as the Chief Linen Keeper on the estate owned by Anippe's new husband Sebak. Mered and Master Sebak forged a friendship as boys when Sebak's parents died. This tenuous master/slave friendship placed Mered at odds with both Hebrews and Ramessids especially when Mered—though thoroughly Hebrew—was required to dress as an Egyptian because of his dealings with traveling merchants. Pressures at home piled atop Mered's work and social stress when it became apparent his wife Puah was unable to bear a child, yet in this particular scene, Mered seems supernaturally calm:

“He gathered [Puah] into his arms again, wishing he could infuse her with the peace he'd found in El-Shaddai but knowing she must seek Him for herself. ‘We have no choice, Puah—not you as a midwife or me as Chief Linen Keeper. Our lives are not our own. We belong to El-Shaddai—and Master Sebak.’”

Mered isn't a soggy bread character. He feels real emotions, questions God, and endures crushing disappointment. But he is *steadfast* and displays an underlying peace that Scripture assures us is available to us today.

Write **Psalms 112:7** on the lines below and discover *the Bible's* perspective on a steadfast heart:

The Biblical Story

In *The Pharaoh's Daughter*, Mered's marriage to the midwife, Puah, is entirely fictional. Scripture doesn't tell us the name of Mered's Hebrew wife nor does it name Puah's husband, but we can infer Puah's family circumstances by reading God's Word and learning about the ancient culture:

“The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, ‘When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.’” **Exodus 1:15-16**

Puah's Confidante

Our first rule of Bible-reading is to put ourselves in the sandals of the characters. So if **YOU** were Puah the midwife, who would you pour out your heart to the moment you and Shiphrah left Pharaoh's throne room? (Circle your answer)

- a pregnant Hebrew woman
- your husband
- the estate owner
- other slave women

I don't think a midwife would burden a pregnant Hebrew woman with the terrifying news, and it's unlikely she'd plead her case to an Egyptian estate owner. She might go to other slave women because—let's face it—women need other women. The following Scripture, however, leads me to believe the midwives also had husbands.

“The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live...And because the midwives feared God, he **gave them families** of their own.” **Exodus 1:17, 21** (**emphasis** added)

A Midwife's Emotions

Let's walk a little farther in Puah's sandals. Imagine the first Hebrew birth she attends after Pharaoh's edict. She and Shiphrah see the newborn is a boy and make the choice NOT to kill the baby.

- What kind of emotions would Puah experience immediately after making the decision to disobey Pharaoh and obey God?
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Imagine how those feelings might change/intensify when Puah received the summons to appear before Pharaoh again. Are you trembling in her sandals as we walk on the dusty path with her and Shiphrah to the audience hall?

“Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, ‘Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?’ The midwives answered Pharaoh, ‘Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.’ So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous.” **Exodus 1:18-20**

- Of course, God strengthened the midwives to respond with truth and dignity, but what mental, spiritual, and physical process might have prepared these midwives to prepare these women to answer boldly when their lives were at stake?
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Hard Questions

After Shiphrah's and Puah's bold stand before Pharaoh, they continued to let Hebrew newborn boys live, but Pharaoh took the decision out of their hands:

“Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: ‘Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.’” **Exodus 1:22**

Hieroglyphs on Egyptian tombs record mass killings of infants by Egyptian soldiers. At some point in Egyptian history, hordes of infants were cast into the Nile—the Bible tells us who and why. Hebrew babies died at the hands of Egyptians—even after Shiphrah and Puah continued to risk their lives and disobey Pharaoh. Had the midwives risked their lives for nothing?

- If you were one of these midwives or their husbands, how would you feel about the God of the Hebrews? How do you reconcile what seems like God's silence with Pharaoh's brazen cruelty?
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God's Word for Today

Nothing shakes our faith like a perceived injustice. However, it's important to remember that God is not shaken when we ask those hard questions.

- What circumstances—either past or present—cause you to ask hard questions of God?
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Of course, Mered in *The Pharaoh's Daughter* is a fictional character, but the steadfastness with which he meets Puah's fears and other disappointments is NOT fictional. We too can experience Mered's kind of peace. Please don't misunderstand. Mered *FEELS* the same fear, anger, and dread we feel when met with injustice, depravity, and grief. He even despairs at times, but he responds with a shiver, not a shake. **Mered's misery is a temporary condition not an eternal destiny because he's learned to trust God's goodness.** What does that mean in every day, shoes-on-the-pavement life? Psalm 112 gives us some answers.

- To discover the first secret of a steadfast heart, WRITE the first three words of **Psalm 112:1**:
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- Also from Psalm 112:1, list two more qualifications that lead to blessing (Hebrew word for *happy*):
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- According to Psalm 112:4, what three qualities bring light to a dark situation?
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- According to Psalm 112:5, what two actions ensure God's good for us?
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- According to Psalm 112:9, what kind of gifts ensure eternal rewards and strengthen our honor in the present.
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- READ Psalm 112:6-8, and list the benefits of the righteous:
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- According to Psalm 112:7, what is the secret of a steadfast heart?
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For Personal Reflection

Jeremiah was a prophet all-too familiar with weeping; in fact, he wrote a whole book about it called, Lamentations. In the third chapter, he shares the hard-learned lesson to his steadfast ministry:

“I remember my affliction and my wandering...and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.’” **Lamentations 3:19-24**

Jeremiah illustrates here that we can’t ignore our pain or deny our feelings. However, we—like the prophet—must view our “affliction and wandering” in light of God’s *eternal* love and faithfulness. It is only by focusing on God’s sufficiency (He is our “portion”) that we can remain steadfast until we see Him face-to-face.

- Is there a life circumstance that robs you of peace? Whether you answered yes or no, what *practical* steps can you take to build a steadfast hope and trust in the Lord? (This may not change the circumstance, but it *will* change your relationship with the God who is working in the circumstance.)
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- Meditate on the phrase: “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed,” and consider how great your Creator’s love for you is. Consider His protection over you *because of that great love*. You are His. *Feel* the power of that love in your life. In what practical ways can that foundation of love embolden you?
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