



# Centennial Bible Study: Inspiring Service

## Session 2

### Girls Gone Wild in the Bible: Standing up to the Powers Exodus 1:8-21; Judges 4 and 5:6, 5:24-27, II Samuel 21:1-14

#### Gathering

The theme of this Bible study is “inspiring service.” Invite participants to reflect briefly on one of the following:

- Tell about a time when you did something really foolish or brave?
- Name a cause or issue that you feel passionate about.
- Relate a humorous or embarrassing experience of being with people from a different culture or race.

#### Encounter the Word

##### Shiphrah and Puah (Read Exodus 1:8-21)

The names Shiphrah and Puah are Egyptian names, not Hebrew. Some scholars believe that the author thought of these women as Egyptian midwives who served the Hebrew slaves. According to Jewish tradition, these are names the Egyptians gave to Jochebed and Miriam, the mother and sister of Moses. (The name of Moses’ mother is given in a genealogy, Exodus 6:20).

- What difference does it make to this story if the midwives are Egyptian or Hebrew? How does it change the story for you to identify Shiphrah and Puah with Jochebed and Miriam, as opposed to two otherwise unknown Hebrew women?
- Verse 17 reads, “But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them...” What does this verse suggest about the women? What does it suggest about the king? Can you think of any other stories from the Bible in which the characters dared to oppose human authorities out of respect for God?
- Verse 19 contains a subterfuge, a device often used in Hebrew story telling as a form of humor. (cf. Gen. 29:26) Did the midwives tell a lie? Were they justified in doing so?

## **Jael (Read Judges 4, 5:6, 5:24-27)**

The Kenites may have been a dark skinned race. They are associated in this story with the father-in-law of Moses who is otherwise called a Midianite (cf. Exodus 3:1), also identified in the Bible as Cushites, or Ethiopians. According to Cain Hope Felder in *Troubling the Biblical Waters*, this implies that the progenitor of biblical monotheism was a black man. Felder maintains that the ancient Hebrews made no distinctions among people based on the color of their skin, and that modern notions of racial distinctiveness are false.

- Two great women are celebrated in this story, Deborah the Israelite and Jael the Kenite. Scholars believe that the song of victory in Judges 5 may be one of the oldest passages in the Bible. What does this suggest about the role of women in ancient society and warfare?
- Why do you suppose that Deborah prophesied to Barak that God would deliver Sisera into his hands, but that the victory would bring no glory to Barak himself (4:9)? Compare this story to Judges 7:2-3. It was considered a terrible disgrace for a warrior to be slain in battle by a woman; see David's comment in 2 Sam. 11:21.
- What can you deduce about the character of Jael from this story? (Note verse 4:19).
- Read 5:28-30 for a poignant and haunting conclusion to this story from another woman's point of view. What do these verses add to the overall narrative?

## **Rizpah (2 Samuel 21:1-14)**

This is a story about vengeance, retributive justice, and honoring the dead. Rizpah kept vigil over the exposed bodies of Saul's sons and grandsons all summer (roughly from May to October). Her selfless devotion moved the king to action. The story teller implies that Rizpah's action brought healing to the land itself by ending a drought that was responsible for the famine (see verses 1 and 14). For more information on Rizpah's status in the house of Saul, see 2 Sam. 3:6-7. The victim has become the heroine of the house of Saul.

## **Engage and Reflect on the Word**

- Had you ever heard of any of these women before this Bible study? Why do you suppose these readings are not included in the lectionary for Sunday worship?
- Suppose we labeled these three stories as examples of 1) civil disobedience, 2) bravery or cunning in the face of danger, and 3) unshakable devotion to a cause. Can you think of three women from more recent history who have demonstrated one of these virtues?
- How is God calling us today to act like Shiphrah and Puah, Jael, or Rizpah?

## **Closing**

Closing Prayer:

O God, we thank you for the brave witness of women and men throughout the ages who dared to obey you rather than human authorities. Give us faith and courage in the face of challenges we face, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.