

Sh'mot

In 1:15-16, Pharaoh orders the midwives to kill all Jewish boys at birth. In 1:17-19, we are told that, out of fear of G-d, the midwives did not obey, and put Pharaoh off with a flimsy excuse when he called them to task

1:20-22

G-d was good to the midwives. The nation multiplied and became very strong.

It happened when (*vay'hi ki*) the midwives feared G-d, that He/he made houses for them (*lahem*).

Pharaoh commanded his whole nation: "Any son that is born, throw him into the river, but keep all the daughters alive."

Questions:

- 1) Why is the midwives fear of G-d repeated?
- 2) What does "made houses for them" mean? What does it add to, and why is it distinct from, being good to them?
- 3) Does *ki* mean "because" or "when"?
- 4) If the houses were built for the midwives, why is the pronoun "for them" masculine rather than *lahen*?
- 5) Does the midwives' defiance improve the condition of the Jews? If yes, how, if Pharaoh simply commands his nation to accomplish the same thing?

Commentaries

Rashi/Talmud – G-d made the midwives into dynasties, the Houses of Priesthood and Kingdom

Saadia Gaon – G-d built refuges for the midwives, where they could be protected/concealed from Pharaoh

Ibn Ezra – G-d gave them children

Rashbam/Chizkuni – Pharaoh built delivery rooms for the midwives where they could be supervised by Egyptians

Netziv – Pharaoh built the houses so that they could be supervised, but this was G-d's way of rewarding them.

My Comments

- 1) All commentaries seem to agree that Pharaoh did not punish the midwives. This suggests that the campaign against the Jews did not yet have broad support.
- 2) The claim that G-d gave them children is connected to the Midrash that Yosheved was one of the midwives, and thus the ensuing story of Mosheh's birth merely plays out this reward. Thus while the midwives' defiance does not necessarily directly improve the Jewish condition, it leads to the birth of Mosheh. Perhaps, then, in this reading the whole significance of the story is that until this point there has been, so far as we know, no Jewish resistance, and the first spark thereof is necessary before G-d can play his part in the geulah.

Shabbat Shalom!

RK