

September 18th, 2022

How Defying Tyrants Invites the Blessing of God

Exodus 1:15-21

Summa Theologica

Last week we discovered 7 wicked characteristics of Pharaoh¹ and that wicked nations always—if they last long enough—turn into houses of slavery. Yet we also learned that God has always opposed wicked nations for the sake of His people. He is not the God only of Israel or the Church, but God over every nation.

Obey God, defy tyrants

This morning we will see how God blesses His people when they disobey and defy tyrants like Pharaoh. What a timely message. One of the great blessings of 2020 is we were able to see how deficient our theology was concerning the civil authorities. Many of us had been breathing the air of statism. We had bought the lie that whatever the state requires, we should give to them. This is why *the Scriptures*—and especially Exodus—are so helpful. Paul says in **Romans 15:4** “*For whatever was written in former days* [Think Exodus 1—these things were written in former days. Why?] *was written for our instruction...*” Exodus is not just history. *It was written for our instruction.* That

¹ 1. His very name has been blotted from the earth just like the rest of the wicked (v.8).

2. He was a covenant breaker for he refused to acknowledge Joseph (v.8).

3. He and all Egypt hated the cultural mandate to be fruitful and fill the earth (v.9).

4. He demanded to be worshipped—setting masters over them and requiring them to build his monuments (v.10-11).

5. He was covetous, instead of kicking Israel out of Egypt, he was greedy for what they could produce (v.10).

6. He was absolutely ruthless, a 7-fold cruelty of his treatment of Israel is recorded in v.13-14.

7. He was willfully stupid, because though He could perceive that the hand of God was against him, he oppressed Israel all the more (v.12).

we may know how God would have us to practice our faith. This morning we are especially instructed on how to practice our faith before tyrants. What is a tyrant? Webster's 1828 defines a tyrant as "a ruler...who exercises unlawful authority." A tyrant is an imposter, a usurper. The goal of every tyrant is more control, more power.² Tyrants should be defied and disobeyed. How do we know? Because God blesses His people when they do so.

The Big Idea...

The LORD **always** blesses His people when they defy tyrants

★ Our Doctrine

★ Our Duty

★ Our Delight

I. Our Doctrine

Beautiful, Radiant and the nameless one

First let's introduce our characters. **v.15** "Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah." There's an subtle mockery here in Moses words. He again leaves Pharaoh nameless, but he tells the names of these midwife slaves. Shiphrah which means

² John Calvin said in 1536 to the King of France "The characteristic of a true sovereign [ruler], is to acknowledge that, in the administration of his kingdom, he is a minister of God. He who does not make his reign subservient to the divine glory, acts not the part of a king, but a robber." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Trans. Henry Beveridge, (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), pg. xxii

beautiful and Puah which means *radiant*. We are not told their physical appearance, but certainly these names are fitting, because they became saviors for a whole host of little boys. Commentators suspect that Beautiful and Radiant were mostly likely the head nurses of the entire midwifery enterprise, because of the sheer number of Israelites at this point.

The first anti-christ

Second let's setup the plot. Previously we saw from **v.12** that the more Pharaoh oppressed Israel "...the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad." So Pharaoh came up with an even more devilish plan. He tells Beautiful and Radiant in **v.16** "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." Though Pharaoh is nameless, we can rightly give him the title of the first anti-christ. What is anti-christ? The apostle John tells us in **1 John 2:22** "Who is the liar but *he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist...*" Pharaoh the first antichrist was seeking to *deny Jesus Christ's very existence* by wiping out all the male offspring of Abraham. It was through Abraham's offspring that Jesus was to come. No doubt Pharaoh was unaware of this. But you have to remember that before Christ's resurrection, the Gentile nations were under the control of Satan. The strong man had not been bound yet (**Matthew 12:28-29**). Scripture gives us examples of demon princes over the nations who fought against any righteous influence getting in. There was a demon prince of Persia (**Daniel 10:13**), a demon prince over Greece (**Daniel 10:20**) and over Tyre (**Ezekiel 28:14-15**). This is drama in the spiritual realm behind Pharaoh's decision. The demon prince of Egypt was trying to wipe out the Christ child from ever coming into existence. From this we see that is modern abortion is not only in line with ancient paganism³ but with demonism. Remember that Pharaoh was motivated to this devilry because **1)** Israel was multiplying at a faster rate than Egypt (**v.9**) and **2)** He was afraid they would

³ Rousas John Rushdoony, *Commentaries on the Pentateuch: Exodus*, (Vallecito, CA.,: Ross House Books), pg. 15

raise up warriors who would fight against him (v.10). So antichrist commanded Beautiful and Radiant to murder God's covenant children when they came out.

The fear of God

Look at v.17 "But the midwives *feared* God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live." Dear congregation the fear of God turns lambs into lions. **Psalm 34:7** "The angel of the Lord encamps round those who fear him..." Pharaoh had the power to execute them for their disobedience. But the fear of God transformed these slave women into lions who stood up to the most powerful man in the world. Beloved, we see that the fear of God is not a private religious feeling meant only for our little holy huddles. Our theology must come out of our fingertips in the public sphere. These midwives feared God in their home *and* in Pharaoh's court. Their fear of God made them *an enemy of Pharaoh*. I think many evangelicals today don't have a category for this. The true fear of God will often mean the state will be as mad as hell at you. The fear of God is the greatest weapon in our arsenal to stand against demonic tyrants. Jesus said **Matthew 10:28** "...do not fear those who kill the body [tyrants] but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Fearing God *just will* require that we disobey an authority figure given the right circumstances.

Did the midwives sin?

So apparently some statist official reported to Pharaoh that many little baby boys were seen. He takes action. Look at v.18-19 "So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and let the male children live?"¹⁹ The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." Now we know that is *not* what happened—v.17 tells us they "...let the male children live." So one of three things is happening here:

1. They lied, mixing sin with their righteous disobedience.
2. They mocked Pharaoh, but God blinded him to it.
3. They knew tyrants aren't entitled to the truth.

Let's take those one at a time.

1. They lied, mixing sin with their righteous disobedience

Unfortunately this is Calvin's view. One of the few places I disagree with him. Calvin seems to absolutize the 9th commandment—"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"—such that *any deception whatsoever* is sin. Two problems with this view. **First**, our passage itself. Twice Moses said they feared God—**v.17 & v.21**. So they feared God enough to disobey Pharaoh, but they didn't fear God when it came to sinful deceit? Doesn't make sense. Furthermore, look what **v.20** says *immediately* after their deceit: "So [or therefore] God dealt well with the midwives." Moses waited to speak of God blessing the midwives until after they deceived Pharaoh so we could see it wasn't just their disobedience that God blessed but their deceit as well. **Secondly**, the problem with saying that all deceit is wrong contradicts human experience. **Ecclesiastes 3:8** says there is a time for peace *and a time for war*. What happens in war? Armies use camouflage, spies deceptively infiltrate, tactics are employed to misdirect. These are all forms of deceit—lying. Why then do we say these are ok? Because we intuitively know that enemies and criminals don't have right to information that would harm or kill others.⁴ We could put it like this, as one author does: "...the Christian is under obligation to God to tell the truth at all times where *normal communication exists*."⁵

⁴ "No enemy or criminal has any right to knowledge from us with can be used to do us evil." Rouas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law Vol. 1*, (Vallecito, CA.: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2020), pg. 553

⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 554

2. They mocked Pharaoh, but God blinded him to it.

This was J.B. Lightfoot's position.⁶ Look at the answer they give in v.19. The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because *the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women*, for they are *vigorous* and *give birth before the midwife comes to them*." This could be mockery. 'Pharaoh our women are not like yours, they are vigorous.' Read between the lines—'Pharaoh your women are pathetic.' 'But furthermore ' they say 'our women give birth before we come.' Now think about that. If all the Hebrew women give birth before the midwives come, why are Hebrew midwives needed at all? They are mocking him. Just as Jesus often mocked tyrants of His day. Apparently God blinded Pharaoh⁷ from reading between the lines. Now I like this option, and I believe it's a sub-species of our third option.

3. They knew tyrants aren't entitled to the truth.

Not all deceit is a violation of the 9th commandment, just as *all killing* is not a violation of the 6th commandment. Yes, they deceived Pharaoh, but he wasn't owed the truth. Tyrants—just like enemies during wartime—are not owed the truth. Yes we are under obligation to tell the truth at all times *where normal circumstances exist*. But war is not normal circumstances. Tyranny is species of war. One author puts it like this: "Pharaoh was at war with God and with Israel; Israel had been enslaved, it's people abused, and it's newborn babies sentenced to death. This was clearly war; even more, it was legalized, wholesale murder. The midwives lied to Pharaoh to save the lives the babies. It was clearly lying; it was clearly justified. And it was clearly blessed by God."⁸

The 3-fold blessing of God

And these midwives were clearly blessed with a three-fold blessing. Look at v.20-21. "So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied

⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, *Preaching the Word: Exodus, Saved for God's Glory*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2015), pg. 37

⁷ Proverbs 21:1

⁸ Rushdoony (Institutes), pg. 556-557

and grew very strong. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.” Because Beautiful and Radiant disobeyed and defied Pharaoh, they helped Israel 1) fulfill the cultural mandate; 2) become strong and mighty and 3) God gave them families of their own.

Our Doctrine: defying tyrants releases God’s blessings

That brings us to **our doctrine**: “The LORD blesses His people when they defy tyrants.” We see it here clearly in our text, but let’s consider two additional proofs elsewhere in Scripture.

Proof 1: The defiance of three Hebrew boys

Please turn to **Daniel 3**. It’s really the book of state tyranny. Here we see the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, building a statue of gold 90 feet tall and required everyone to fall down and worship it when the music sounded. You were allowed to still worship your own god, but you had to give ultimate fealty to the state. Well Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego defied the order of the king. So Nebuchadnezzar had a furnace that he threatened to throw them in if they didn’t obey. Look at **v.16-18** “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”” What happened? Nebuchadnezzar threw them in the fiery furnace. But Christ showed up, being the fourth image in the flames and delivered the three boys. Afterwards Nebuchadnezzar made a new decree (**v.29**) that if anyone spoke against their

God, they would be severely punished. The LORD blessed these three boys for their defiance.⁹

Proof 2: The defiance of Peter and John¹⁰

Turn to **Acts 4**. Here Peter and John were arrested by the Sadducees for healing a lame beggar and preaching the gospel in public. And they wanted them to stop speaking in Christ's name. Look at **v.18-21** "So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." ²¹ And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened." Furthermore God showed his pleasure in this defiance by sending an earthquake in response to Peter's prayer (**v.31**) and we read "... and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." The LORD blessed Peter, John, and the whole early church for their defiance.

What about the martyrs?

Someone may object "But there have been many Christians who have defied tyrants and who have been executed for it. Where's the blessing of God then?" First I'm not arguing that at every sign of tyranny, we ought to publicly go forth and defy the authorities. In the several cases I have brought forth, these

⁹ Proof: The defiance of Daniel

Turn a couple pages to **Daniel 6**. This is after Babylon perished as a nation because they continue to lift themselves up against the Lord of Heaven. Now the king of Persia, Darius, was tricked into signing an edict forbidding prayer for 30 days except to him. But Daniel defied the king and prayed anyway. So he was thrown into the lions den. But look what Daniel says the next morning in **v.21** "Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! ²² My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him..." Daniel defied the king, and God found him blameless for it and rescued him. Just like Nebuchadnezzar, Darius then decreed that all people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel (**v.26**). The LORD blessed Daniel for his defiance.

¹⁰ We can also see another proof a chapter later in Acts 5:27-42

men and women of God were forced into a position of defiance. There are times when fleeing from tyranny is the better choice than open defiance. See Francis Schaeffer's *A Christian Manifesto* for how this works out. But back to the objection: I would argue that in every case of justified defiance against tyranny, God *always* pours out His blessing even when it costs us our lives. For two reasons. **First**, when our blood is spilled for the Lord's sake, we should rejoice as the early apostles did—**Acts 5:41** “Then they left the presence of the council, *rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.*” **Second**, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. Remember what I said last week? The more the Church is oppressed, the more God causes it to multiply and fill the earth. Martyrdom is gasoline on the fire. That is a great blessing indeed.

Summa Theologica

That is **our doctrine**: The midwives defied Pharaoh because they feared God and in the process protected the covenant people of God and as a result were blessed beyond measure. “The LORD *always* blesses His people when they defy tyrants.”

II. Our Duty

Informatory Use

Our *first duty* is to *consider carefully* what a tyrant *is*. Children, boys and girls, perhaps you've heard the story of Dracula. He was actually a real figure in history, not a vampire like the movies make him out to be. Prince Dracula a.k.a Vlad the Impaler lived from 1431-1476. He was king of a region in modern day Romania. When he was a boy, the Turks invaded and his father Vlad II was forced to surrender his son. Some time later Dracula escaped and ascended the throne. One author reports “He then waged war against Turkey...[and] during the 39 years of his rule, he is said to have killed between 40,000 and 100,000 people [roughly 20% of the population]...Dracula controlled his people...by

total terror. [On one occasion] when...envoys refused to remove their turbans in his throne room, he had their [helmets] hammered on to their heads...[His own citizens] were subjected to unspeakable tortures before execution [for crimes he deemed unexceptionable].”¹¹ Children that is a picture of tyrant: *A man who assumes all power and rules like he is a god, unaccountable to anyone. A man who doesn't rule by God's law, but rules by whatever fits his fancy.*

Foolish rulers vs. tyrannical rulers

We need to distinguish between foolish rulers and tyrannical rulers. In Scripture, there were two kings who lived at the same time King Jehoshaphat of Judah and King Ahab of Israel. Jehoshaphat was at times a very foolish ruler, joining his son in marriage to Ahab's daughter, and aiding that wicked family who was steeped in Baal worship. In fact, Jehu the prophet rebuked him for this. **2 Chronicles 19:2-3** “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the Lord. ³Nevertheless, some good is found in you, for you destroyed the Asheroth out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God.” Jehoshaphat at times was a foolish ruler, but not a tyrannical ruler. He deserved to be rebuked.

King Ahab, on the other hand was a tyrant. **1 Kings 16:30** says “Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him.” He stole Naboth's vineyard by standing by while his witch of a wife Jezebel brought false charges against him and had him stoned. What did the prophet Elijah do with this tyrant? He defied him by telling him that on account of his wickedness it would not rain for three years (**1 Kings 17:1**) He scorned him calling him the troubler of Israel (**1 Kings 18:19**). He mocked his demonic religion at Mt. Carmel saying that his god couldn't answer the prophets because he was on the toilet (**1 Kings 18:27**). Elijah gave King Ahab the exact treatment he deserved, and he was righteous for doing so. That's our **first duty**, we need to *carefully consider* the difference between a foolish ruler and a tyrannical ruler.

¹¹ Rouas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law Vol. 3*, (Vallecito, CA.,: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2009), pg. 139

Elenctic Use

Our **second duty** is to *answer an objection* that goes like this: “Unless the government is hindering our ability to preach the gospel, we should always obey them.” This is gross reductionism and it goes against everything we’ve seen in our passage and our proofs. There are at least four things in which we should defy the state: **1)** We should defy the state if they prevent the preaching of any part of God’s Word including the Gospel (**Acts 5:29**). **2)** We should defy the state if they require us to break any part of the 2nd table of the Law towards our neighbor—like in commanding the midwives to murder. **3)** We should defy the state if they required us to break any part of the 1st table of the Law, meaning when they demand our worship—like in the case of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. **4)** We should defy the government *to the degree* they don’t stay in their lane. This last one is the tricky one. But Jesus lays out this principle in **Matthew 22:21** “...render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” God has given a limited authority to the state, and when it takes more authority than it is given, it ought to be defied. Let me give you an example from King Uzziah’s life. Please turn to **2 Chronicles 26:16-19**

“But when he [King Uzziah] was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. ¹⁷ But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the Lord who were men of valor, ¹⁸ and they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, “*It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the Lord God.*””

King Uzziah an agent of the state was stepping out of his lane by promoting himself in the temple. God struck him with leprosy for it. Now Azariah the priest didn’t defy the King when he was in his proper lane, but he did defy him when he wasn’t. To make it applicable to today, whenever state tries to regulate the other institutions—our homes, how we educate our children for example; or

our churches, the manner in which we worship—they should be defied. They have been given the power of the sword, not the shepherd’s staff(the family) or the keys of the kingdom(the Church). That’s our **second duty**: we should not reduce our defiance to the state to this one thing of preaching the gospel, the Bible doesn’t do that.

Experimental Use

Our **third duty** is to *examine* ourselves. There are two extremes we must avoid. **Extreme #1** is to be a *statist lackey*: to believe the state in whatever it says, and to obey it in whatever it requires. **Extreme #2** is to be *anti-authority*: to rebel against the state regardless of what it says, to be in constant opposition not only to tyrants but to anyone you disagree with. Do either of these extremes characterize you? Do you realize that one day you might be required to disobey the state, and that if you don’t, it’s sin? Conversely do you realize that if you are always in opposition to the state it is sin? That’s our **third duty**, *examine yourself*, what is your disposition towards the state?

Admonitory Use

That brings us to our **final duty**, we must *rebuke* ourselves if we find ourselves in either of these extremes. If you are a *statist lackey*, you believe we should just obey whatever the state requires even when it’s evil, listen again to the prophet Jehu in his rebuke “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the Lord” (**2 Chronicles 19:2**). God does not hold those who are accessories to evil governments guiltless. King Jehoshaphat was disciplined severely for his accessory to King Ahab. Will He not discipline you for doing the same? Conversely if you are an *anti-authority*—you oppose the state in everything—then heed the warning of the Apostle Paul. **Romans 13:1-2** “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever

resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, *and those who resist will incur judgment.*” Rebuke yourself if either one of these extremes mark you.

III. Our Delight

The deeper magic

Now there’s a deeper story that is hidden in these verses, like the deep magic found in Narnia. This ancient story of two midwives—Beautiful and Radiant—who saved Israel speak of Another savior. Last time we saw how we were tyrants just like Pharaoh, nameless, heartless, ruthless, faithless.

But now we see how helpless and hopeless we are to do anything about it.

The slaves

This generation of Israelites were not born freemen. They were born into slavery under the tyrant of Egypt. “From birth they were slaves.”¹² *That’s you*, that’s every human being since Adam—we weren’t born free, we were born in slavery to sin. **Psalm 51:5** “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

But it’s a double bondage, like Israel, we were under a tyrant—Satan himself. **John 12:40** “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.”

Furthermore Israel was incapable of rescuing themselves. As slaves they could not overcome Pharaoh’s ruthless and all-powerful army. But neither did they want to be rescued, not really. Sure they didn’t like the chains and forced labor,

¹² Michael P. V. Barrett, *The Gospel of Exodus: Misery, Deliverance, Gratitude*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), pg. 37

but they loved the same gods that Israel loved. **Joshua 24:14** says that this generation served the gods of Egypt. They loved the god who enslaved them. Even after they were rescued, they longed to return to their slavery. Loved ones that's you. First you were totally incapable of rescuing yourself from the slavery of sin. Just as the blind man cannot give himself sight, so you cannot deliver your own soul. But here's the thing, like Israel, you didn't want to be saved. Though you hated the chains, you loved the tyrant of this world. **Ephesians 2:2-3** You followed "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind."

Because the Israelites as a whole loved the same gods as Egypt, they deserved their misery. They deserved their slavery. And they deserved the sentence that Pharaoh leveled against them. Death. And that's what you and I deserved—**Romans 6:23** "For the wages of sin is death."

The Savior

But then in two saviors aptly named Beautiful and Radiant are called on the scene when the people of Israel appear to be on the brink of destruction. Salvation always comes at just the right time. **Galatians 4:4** "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son."

These great task of these two midwives was to bring new life into the world. They foreshadowed the Lord Jesus Christ who brings new life, eternal life, into the world. **John 10:27-28** "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish..."

Beautiful and Radiant feared God more than anything and as a result their behavior before Pharaoh was blameless. Their righteous behavior saved the children of Israel. So Jesus Christ feared God and blameless, and we are saved by His righteousness.

These two women loved their neighbors more than their own life. They risked everything, their very flesh and blood, they were willing to be cut off, but were unwilling that any of God's precious covenant children be killed. But Jesus Christ loved His own people more. He didn't merely risk His life, He laid down His life. God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all. He died and was buried, and rose again from the dead, not for His sake but because of His great love for us. He loved us more than His own life.

Finally these lowly midwives defied the king—the tyrant—of this world and received a 3-fold blessing including their own children. So when Christ defied the god of this world—Satan—he received a thousand-fold blessing, children from every tribe and tongue and nation. The nations became His inheritance. **Psalm 2:7-8** “The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. ^sAsk of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.”

Hortatory Use

Loved ones that is the deeper magic of Exodus 1. This story is about your deliverance at the hands of the Great Deliverer. Christ Jesus freed you from your slavery to sin, cured you of your love of the gods of this world, gave you eternal life, imputed to you His righteousness, and destroyed the works of that tyrant, the devil. So I exhort you, do not fear, for there is a new King on the throne. Fear not for He is with you. Fear not for He will strengthen you and help you and uphold you with His righteous right hand. Beloved fear God above all. Defy tyrants, obey God, and wait for His blessings.