

## INTRODUCTION

The Olympics in Beijing are in full swing and I hope you’ve enjoyed watching and cheering for our American Olympians. One of our members, Rosella Webb, has a grandson who is a member of the USA Judo team and she’s been kind enough to forward his emails describing the Olympics to me. It’s a life-changing experience for those competitors!

It’s time for our next version of Olympic trivia! Here are the multiple choice questions for this message.

1. Which Olympic Games were the first to be televised?

- A. Berlin, 1936
- B. Rome, 1960
- C. Tokyo, 1964

(Tell your answer to your neighbor). The answer is A. Adolph Hitler was anxious to show off the racial and technical superiority of the Aryan race, so television cameras inside the stadium broadcast the Olympics to screens set up around Berlin. (The first Olympics televised into the U.S. was in 1960). In the Berlin Olympics, the spoiler of Hitler’s racial superiority theory was the son of an Alabama sharecropper, Jesse Owens, who won four gold medals. Hitler shook hands with the German medal winners, but refused to acknowledge Jesse Owens.

2. Which Olympian has won the most medals?

- A. Carl Lewis
- B. Larissa Latynina
- C. Michael Phelps

I know you want to say Michael Phelps, and he has won more *gold* medals than any Olympian, but the answer is B. Larissa Latynina was a Russian gymnast who won six medals in three different Olympics for a total of 18, a number that has yet to be surpassed.

3. Who was the first Olympian to be disqualified for drug use?

- A. Thomas Hicks, 1904
- B. Hans-Gunner Liljenwall, 1968
- C. Ben Johnson, 1988

The correct answer is B. Actually, the IOC didn’t have a drug policy until the 1960s, so that when Thomas Hicks, an American marathoner, ran in 1904, his trainer actually injected him with strychnine and he slugged down a bottle of brandy about four miles from the finish of his race—there was medical literature at the time that claimed an athlete couldn’t finish a marathon *without* drugs. In Mexico City, heptathlete Liljenwall was tested and disqualified for alcohol in his system. He had consumed two beers before winning the pistol firing competition!

4. Who was the first Olympic swimmer to swim 100 meters in less than a minute?

- A. Johnny Weissmüller, 1924
- B. Rowdy Gaines, 1984
- C. Michael Phelps, 2004

The answer is A. Of course, Weissmüller went on to become famous for his role in the six Tarzan movies. His undulating Tarzan cry is still used today. There’s a true story about

Weissmüller’s trip to Cuba in 1958. He and some friends were on the way to play golf when their vehicle was attacked by bandits. Weissmüller climbed out and gave his famous Tarzan yell. When the banditos heard that they stopped and said, “Welcome to Cuba, Tarzan!” Then instead of robbing them, they escorted him and his friends to the golf course. It’s good to be Tarzan, I guess!

During this month I’m talking about what it means to be a champion for God. Rather than talk about famous Bible champions like Abraham, Samson, or David, I want you to meet some of the lesser-known champions of the Bible. Champions like Benaiah, the lion-chaser or champions like Abigail, the risk-taker. In this message we’re going to meet two of my favorite champions—Puah, and Shiphrah. Now if you don’t have a clue about who they are that’s great because at least I know that you’re going to learn something today!

One of my favorite movies is “Braveheart,” starring Mel Gibson as William Wallace. I can’t resist crying at the end as he sees his wife in the crowd. Out of respect for William Wallace, I’m calling Puah and Shiphrah the original bravehearts—because they had the bravery to do the right thing, even when it wasn’t easy, popular, or even legal!

We meet Puah and Shiphrah in the first chapter of Exodus, but their story really begins with the story of Joseph, the boy with the coat of many colors. Joseph was sold into slavery to Egypt by his brothers. Because he honored God and always did the right thing, God promoted him to be the Prime Minister of the entire country. Joseph eventually brought his father, Jacob, and all of his brothers and their families and they lived in Egypt in a place they called Goshen—that’s where we get the phrase, “Land o’ Goshen.” Over several generations, the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied until their population rivaled that of the Egyptians.

Exodus 1:8-10. “Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. ‘Look,’ he said to his people, ‘the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.’”

This wicked king devised a plan to commit genocide against Jews.

Exodus 1:15-22. “The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, ‘When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.’ The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. 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. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people, ‘Every boy that is born [to the Hebrews] you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.’”

Puah and Shiphrah were the Ob/Gyn doctors of their time. They were medical professionals

trained to deliver babies. For all their medical careers, their focus had been on delivering healthy babies, so they were heartbroken when the king commanded them to kill all the male babies. Hebrew midwives sat on a stool below the eye level of the birth mother with a sharp knife to cut the umbilical cord. It would have been a simple task to use that knife to kill a baby and then they could have told the parents there had been a fatal complication at birth. If Puah and Shiphrah refused to obey the king, they could have been executed.

I don't know if they discussed it among each other or not, but in my imagination I see them going straight from the palace to a little Hebrew home where an expectant mother's water had just broken. Puah and Shiphrah spring into action like the professionals they were. After a while, a tiny cry is heard and Puah notices it's a boy. Shiphrah has the knife in her hand and her eyes lock onto Puah's. With a quick nod of agreement, Shiphrah cuts the cord and ties off both ends. In that instant these two champions made a brave choice—they chose life. They wrap up the infant and place him in his mother's arms. They both smile as Shiphrah says, “Congratulations Hannah, it's a healthy baby boy! May God be praised!” And then they make the warbling sound of joy that women in the Middle East still make.

Now you know why Puah and Shiphrah are champions. They were ordered to kill the baby boys, and instead they let them live at the risk of their own lives. There are three important life lessons that we can learn from the championship performance of Puah and Shiphrah.

## **1. A CHAMPION FEARS GOD MORE THAN PEOPLE**

Twice in our short passage we read that Puah and Shiphrah feared God. They broke Pharaoh's law in order to obey the law of God. That's called civil disobedience. Since they broke the law, you might be wondering if it's okay for you to break the law. Listen carefully: a Christian may choose to commit civil disobedience *only* when the law of the land commands you to do something God's law prohibits, or when man's law forbids you to do something God's law commands. And then you must be willing to suffer the consequences of civil disobedience. Now I can promise you that driving 65 in a 30 mph zone doesn't qualify for Christian civil disobedience! But, sometimes when man's law contradicts God's law, we're faced with a choice. One afternoon in Montgomery, Alabama Rosa Parks was tired after a day at work when she got on a public bus. When a white man told her to move to the back of the bus, she refused. The law said colored people must sit in the back of the bus, but Rosa Parks decided in that moment God was no respecter of persons so she committed civil disobedience. She was arrested, but because of her and others, there have been many changes in civil rights.

Fortunately, in America we aren't often forced to choose between God's law or man's law. But there are millions of Christians around the world who aren't allowed to worship openly, so they have to gather in underground churches in fear of being arrested—they're committing civil disobedience. God forbid, but if our nation ever passed a law that prohibited us from gathering to worship, then there are many of us who would break the law. Some people predict that under the guise of hate crime legislation, we may soon have laws regulating what I can and can't say about certain kinds of conduct from this pulpit. I seriously doubt it will happen, but if it does, I'm going on record now that you can lock me up because I'm going to preach the truth found in God's Word.

Why did Puah and Shiphrah fear God instead of Pharaoh? The worst thing Pharaoh could have done to them was to kill them. The worse thing any human adversary can do to us is to kill us—but death isn't the end. Listen to what Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell...” (now if you stop there you might infer that God is a scary, hostile deity just waiting to throw people in hell, but Jesus is saying exactly the opposite of that! He continued, “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God... Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:4-7) The reason we should have a holy reverence for God is because although He is all powerful, He is a Creator who loves His creation. There are billions of sparrows and God knows every feather on every bird—and He cares even *more* for you!

Do you fear God more than people? The Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom. (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10) Fear of God doesn't mean you cringe in terror before Him, it means you love Him with a passionate affection. I love Brennan Manning's definition of the fear of the Lord: “Fear of God consists of silent wonder, radical amazement, and affectionate awe at the infinite goodness of God.” (Abba's Child) So, if your boss ever asks you to lie or cheat—remember Puah and Shiphrah and fear God. Teenagers, if your friends try to tempt you to do something wrong, remember Puah and Shiphrah and do the right thing!

## **2. A CHAMPION CHOOSES LIFE OVER DEATH**

Puah and Shiphrah were forced to choose between the life and death of those infants—and they chose life. Some critics say they lied to Pharaoh by saying the Hebrew women were having babies before they could arrive and kill them. Lying is never right—but in the case of choosing life and death—life is always the right choice. Puah and Shiphrah were doing what those brave European Christians did during WWII when they were illegally hiding Jews from the Nazis—it was a life and death choice—and they chose life.

I can't read this story about the death of newborn infants back then without thinking about the death of pre-born children in our time. The major difference between then and now is that we have the technology to kill a baby in the womb, and I'm certain that if Pharaoh had been in possession of that technology, he would have used it. Since 1973, our nation is corporately guilty of snuffing out the beating hearts of millions of children who never had a chance to live. We read in Jeremiah 1:5 that God forms us in the womb and already knows us then.

So, there is no question in my mind that God is pro-life. But when you think about it God is also pro-choice—He gives us a choice about everything in life—not just abortion. We aren't robots who are preprogrammed to make predetermined choices. God gives us a choice, but He loves us so much He advises us to choose life. “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20) Every day you have choices—some lead to life and some lead to death. When you choose Jesus, you choose life. Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full!” (John 10:10)

### 3. A CHAMPION’S CHOICES PRODUCE LASTING RESULTS

There is a law of cause and effect woven into the fabric of our universe. It basically says the small choices you make now can have enormous consequences down the road. In hindsight, the bravery of Puah and Shiphrah NOT to kill the boy babies saved an entire generation of Hebrew men. Included in that generation was a man named Moses—God’s deliverer. If Puah and Shiphrah hadn’t displayed the bravery to defy Pharaoh’s order, Moses’ mother may never have placed Moses in a basket in the river to be discovered by Pharaoh’s daughter.

Just think what might have been different in world history if Pharaoh had succeeded in killing the Jews, because they are the people through whom God sent the Messiah. In Revelation 12 John saw a vision of a lady giving birth to a son, and a dragon was there to try to kill the child as soon as he was born. The woman is a symbol of Israel, and the baby is a symbol of the Messiah. The dragon is the devil, and from the beginning of history he has been trying to destroy the Jewish people in order to try to destroy the Messiah.

Would you agree that throughout history there have been many intentional attempts to destroy Jews and the nation of Israel? Pharaoh tried and failed. Later when Jesus was born, Herod the Great tried to massacre God’s deliverer, so he had the boy babies in Bethlehem killed—but he failed. Do you think it’s simply an historical coincidence that Hitler had 6 million Jews killed in WWII? And for 1,900 years there wasn’t even a nation called Israel—the Jewish people were dispersed around the world. But in 1948, Israel came back into existence as a nation for the first time since 70 A.D. And, now, why should we be surprised when Iran and other Muslim nations publicly announce they are committed to the total annihilation of Israel? Wake up, folks. Everything that’s going on today is part of God’s plan. That’s why you should read your newspaper in one hand the Bible in your other hand.

But the point I’m making is the seemingly insignificant choices of Puah and Shiphrah had an impact on world events that they could never imagine. In the same way, every choice you make has consequences as well. If you make bad choices you those closest to you will experience negative consequences. But if you make champion choices—choose to do the right thing—you and those around you will experience positive consequences. That’s why it’s important to you to *do the right thing*—every time.

You may not see the results of your good choice right away, but if you’ll be patient, in time you’ll see the positive results. The Bible makes this promise with these words, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people.” (Galatians 6:9-10)

In the scientific community, there is a theory called “The Butterfly Effect.” The phrase was coined in 1960 by a meteorologist at MIT named Edward Lorenz. He was using a computer program that simulated weather patterns and he mistakenly entered a number to the thousandth decimal point—he thought it wouldn’t really affect the weather model, but to his surprise that tiny mathematical error changed the entire national weather pattern. So he theorized that even a tiny puff of wind, like a butterfly flapping its wings, could conceivably alter wind currents and

change the weather pattern thousands of miles away—thus the butterfly effect. As applied to all of life the butterfly effect says: Small choices and small actions become magnified over time and can have major consequences. We sometimes forget to connect the dots between choices and consequences. That’s why when you do the right thing, there are always positive results.

## CONCLUSION

With so much attention directed at Beijing during the 29th Olympiad, we might forget that China has only recently come to the Olympic stage. They didn’t compete in any summer Olympics until the 1984 games in Los Angeles. But China has had an Olympic hero since the 1924 games. The first Olympic gold medalist to be born and die in China was Eric Liddell. Although he competed for Scotland, he spent most of his life in China and China has claimed him as their first Olympic hero in their earliest Olympic literature.

Eric Liddell (rhymes with “fiddle”) was born on January 16, 1904 in Tianjin, the child of Scottish missionaries. He later attended school in Scotland, where he excelled in rugby and track. He qualified for several events, including the 100 meter dash, in the 1924 Olympics in Paris. Contrary to the movie, “Chariots of Fire,” Liddell knew months in advance that the qualifying heat for the 100 meter would be run on a Sunday. Because of his personal convictions against competing on the Lord’s Day, he arrived in Paris knowing he wouldn’t run that Sunday. He had also been selected to run in the 4x100 meter relay and the 4x400 relay, both of which were run on Sunday as well. His decision could have cost him three gold medals—not just one. But obviously, Eric was interested in another better kind of gold.

There was great pressure from friends and other athletes for Eric to compromise his convictions. The Prince of Wales personally begged Eric to reconsider and run on Sunday, but Eric politely refused the Prince because of his commitment to his King. As the starting gun sounded that Sunday morning for the 100 meter qualifying heat, Eric was giving his testimony at a church in Paris not far from the Olympic stadium.

Eric earned a spot in the finals for the 400 meters, which wasn’t held on a Sunday. On the day of the race as Liddell stood near the starting line, an American trainer slipped a piece of paper in his hands with a quotation from 1 Samuel 2:30, “Those who honor me, I will honor.”

Eric exploded out of the blocks with that paper crushed in his fist as if it was a 100-meter sprint. Observers expected him to fade, but he threw his head back and ran. He had commented to his sister once, “When I run, I feel God’s pleasure.”

With his head held back in his unorthodox running style, Eric crossed the finish line breaking the world record and finishing five meters ahead of the second place runner. He had won the gold medal in 47.6 seconds!

After winning the gold medal, Eric Liddell was a celebrity and could have chosen any job he wanted back in Scotland. Instead, he chose to return to China, the land of his birth, and share the good news of God’s love with the Chinese people. He spent several years teaching at a college for Chinese students.

In 1943 when the Japanese occupied China, Liddell was imprisoned in the Weih sien (now known as Weifang) Interment Camp. For the next two years he worked in terrible conditions to maintain the morale of the other prisoners. Winston Churchill arranged a prisoner exchange with the Japanese and because Liddell was a famous athlete, he was on the list to be liberated. However, at the last minute, Eric gave up his place to a pregnant woman.

The prisoners were given enough food and water to barely keep them alive, and on February 21, 1945, malnourished and sick; our Olympic champion died...and crossed the finish line with his head held back in victory. He captured the real gold.

In 1991, a memorial plaque was placed at the site of Eric Liddell's death in Weifang. The inscription is taken from a simple verse in Isaiah that says, “They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary.”

Puah and Shiphrah did the right thing by obeying God rather than Pharaoh. Eric Liddell did the right thing by refusing to compromise his convictions, and by devoting his life to serving Christ. Will you be a champion for God? May God raise up a new generation of Puah's, Shiphrah's, and Eric's who will do the right thing!

## OUTLINE

### 1. A CHAMPION FEARS GOD MORE THAN PEOPLE

Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell..." (now if you stop there you might infer that God is a scary, hostile deity just waiting to throw people in hell, but Jesus is saying exactly the opposite of that! He continued, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God...Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." *Luke 12:4-7*

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"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him." *Deuteronomy 30:19-20*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes