

## **“Our Great Salvation”**

**Exodus 2:1-10**

**May 16, 2010**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

In our survey of the Old Testament, I have chosen what I consider to be the 13 most significant events in the 39 books of the Old Testament. We come today to the well-known story of the exodus of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. This story is important for several reasons. Historically, it was a significant event in the life of the nation of Israel. God had promised Abraham that his descendants would become a mighty nation, and that has happened during their time in Egypt. But he also promised them a land, and almost 600 years has passed with no land being given to them yet. The exodus story begins the fulfillment of that promise of land for Abraham’s descendants.

There is another reason this is an important story. It helps us to understand and appreciate our own salvation. Three great events in the history of Israel are seen as a pattern of the three great stages in the redemption of all God’s people. The exodus is seen as a pattern of our salvation. The wilderness wanderings of Israel for forty years is seen as parallel to our current Christian lives, and the entrance of Israel into the Promised Land is seen as analogous to our entry into heaven at death. So the book of Exodus is intended by God to help us to understand what our salvation is all about and to restore the emotional impact of this salvation.

To say it differently, in order to understand and feel what the word “salvation” means, it is important that we see the story behind it. It is when we remember the story that we are able to resist the tendency to make the word “saved” a common and trite expression. Let me give you an illustration, with apologies beforehand to the Alabama fans among us for the pain this may bring to you. If I say the words, “Punt, Bama, Punt!” the effect of these words is completely dependent on your ability to remember the story behind them. If you don’t know the story, you can understand all three words, but miss what they are really saying. You may think that a football team named Alabama is being told to employ a common football play usually done on fourth down, whereby one team kicks the ball to the other team in order to maximize their own team’s field position. But those who know the story will remember that the Alabama football team was very strong that year of 1972, and the Auburn offense was ineffective for most of the game. As it turned out, their most effective play of the game occurred when Alabama went back to punt. Twice in the fourth quarter, that play resulted in a blocked punt that was run in for an Auburn touchdown, leading to Auburn’s only two touchdowns and a one point victory that day. Knowing that story will lead you to understand that the words

“Punt, Bama, Punt!” are laced with sarcasm. They are meant not to instruct a football team on the appropriate play, but to taunt.

In the same way, you can't really understand and feel the emotional impact of the word “salvation” without remembering the story behind it. So our goal during this study is both to understand and thrill at our salvation. We want God to restore unto us the joy of our salvation through this story.

## **I. Delivered from Bondage**

In order to rejoice in our salvation, we must appreciate that from which we have been saved. Like Israel, we have been saved from harsh taskmasters. Let's consider first the story of Israel's deliverance before applying it to ourselves. During Israel's 400 years in Egypt, they had multiplied to become a mighty nation. They became so large and significant a force within Pharaohs' kingdom that he began to fear them. The early Pharaohs were favorable toward Israel, remembering that Joseph had helped them to become a prosperous nation 400 years before this. But all that is forgotten with this Pharaoh, and he sees them only as a threat. So he came up with a plan that must have seemed to him very clever. He would diminish their numbers through hard work, while at the same time profiting from their hard labor. So he set taskmasters over them and forced them to work, building two cities to add to his prestige and wealth. But his plan backfired, and it resulted not in diminished numbers of Israelites, but in even greater numbers.

Pharaoh's next effort was to increase the pressure by ordering them to be treated cruelly. He was probably hoping that the combination of hard work and despair due to his cruelty would work to his desired end of their reduced numbers. Again his attempt failed, leading him to more overt means of reducing their numbers. He ordered that all male babies should be killed. Israel was experiencing a bondage of great bitterness, summarized in 1:13-14. Though it is somewhat hidden in most translations, there is one word that is repeated five times in these two verses. Let me read them more literally, and it will be obvious to you what that word is. **“And the Egyptians cause the sons of Israel to serve with harshness, and make their lives bitter in hard service, in clay, and in brick, and in every kind of service in the field; all their service in which they have served is with harshness.”**

Israel was in bondage to harsh service. The primary theme of the book of Exodus is a movement from a harsh service to Pharaoh to that of service of the Lord. The book begins with serving Pharaoh and ends with serving the Lord. That's why nearly half of this book is concerned with instructions about the tabernacle. Do you remember what Moses said when he delivered to Pharaoh God's message? **“Let my people go, that they may serve me”** (Ex. 7:16). It's the very same word that we just read from chapter 1. According to the Bible,

salvation is being delivered from the worship and service of all that is not ultimate, that which is not God, and being freed up to worship the God who gives life to his worshipers.

If we are going to understand our own salvation, we must first see the harsh taskmasters from whose service we have been delivered. You may be thinking to yourself, “I don’t serve anyone, because I just do whatever I want to do.” But the truth is that there are some obvious taskmasters who rule over us and make our lives difficult, but others that rule over us more quietly. One of the harshest taskmasters ruling over us in this more quiet way is that of autonomy. Autonomy means simply self-rule, and it is in opposition to God’s rule over us. One of the ironies of this story of the exodus is that the one who was the author of the harsh service of Israel, Pharaoh, is himself serving the even harsher taskmaster of self. As Egypt’s leader, he had the power to do whatever he wanted, and he used this power to seek to control his world to his own ends. He wanted to secure his power by suppressing the threat he saw in the growing Jewish population. But like all taskmasters, he was treated poorly by his desire for autonomous control of his life. It resulted in his being ruled by fear and anxiety. His desire to take control of his life ended up destroying his kingdom, his family and his own life, after he drowned in the waters of the Red Sea.

The exodus story provides us with a wonderful contrast to Pharaoh in the midwives of chapter 1, Shiphrah and Puah. Midwives were toward the low end of the social structure in Israel. Not only were they women, but they were barren women in a society that commonly viewed barrenness as a judgment from God. But we read that these women, on the opposite end of the power spectrum from Pharaoh, had something very significant going for them. They served the true God instead of the god of self. They refused to put to death the Jewish babies because they feared God. That fear delivered them from a fear of Pharaoh, who is himself filled with a fear of the Israelites. The weak ones have no fear and the strong one is ruled by his fears. Moreover, the names of these two women are preserved for all time, while the name of Pharaoh is not given.

Who is your harsh taskmaster? Who are you serving? Is it, like Pharaoh, the god of control? You think that god is serving you, but the truth is that you are serving it, and it will use you and destroy you. Is it the god of comfort and predictability? That’s a god I sometimes serve, and it rewards its worshipers with fear, joylessness and anxiety. Is it the god of success, who never delivers the reward of satisfaction that it promises, but leads to broken relationships and more fear and anxiety? God has come to deliver us from these masters and to lead us into the place of serving him alone, the God who brings life to his worshipers.

## **II. Delivered to Freedom**

We humans can't help but be worshipers. So it is not enough that we be delivered from serving such harsh taskmasters as control, comfort and success. We must replace their service with service to the true God. And since we worship whatever we come to regard as beautiful and lovely, we must see something of the beauty of God if we are to worship and serve him. The beauty of God portrayed here is that he is a God who serves us. The harsh taskmasters use us and destroy us, while the true God serves us and gives us life. One of the ways God is portrayed as doing that in our passage is by his quiet control of our lives for the purpose of blessing.

God is quietly present in this text. Commentators point out how the author masterfully avoids mentioning the name of God in the first couple of chapters of the book, with only a couple of exceptions. This absence of God reflects the common feeling we all have when things seem to be falling apart. And things certainly did seem to be falling apart for the descendents of Jacob. The most powerful man in the world had determined to bring harm upon them. Where is God when things seem to be falling apart? He is quietly working behind the scenes to bring about his good purposes. So all Pharaoh's efforts only serve to fulfill God's purposes. He tries to weaken Israel through his cruel treatment of them, but only manages to strengthen them further and motivate them to prefer the wilderness with the true God rather than the abundance of Egypt with the false gods.

We also see God's quiet presence in the way Moses, the deliverer, is raised up. When Moses was born, his mother hid him from the Egyptian authorities. But at three months of age, probably because of the baby's size, it became too risky to continue trying to conceal him. So she devised a plan of leaving the baby beside the river, a place where detection by a woman would be likely. Women were the ones who usually came to the river, for the purposes of bathing or washing, and it was probably her hope that feminine compassion would prevent the cruel murder of her child. As you know, her plan worked better than she could have hoped, with the result that she was hired to nurse her own baby, after which she would turn him over to Pharaoh's daughter.

This story is filled with irony. For example, Moses is saved when his mother does exactly what Pharaoh had ordered—that male babies be cast into the Nile. Jochebed, Moses' mother, is paid from the treasury of Pharaoh for doing the very thing she most wanted to do—nursing her baby boy. The thing Pharaoh most fears, an Israelite uprising, he helps to promote by raising and training the man who would lead it. As a result of Pharaoh's actions, Moses receives the best education his world had to offer. But the biggest irony of all is that the one who seems to get everything he wants, Pharaoh, ends up getting destroyed, while the ones who seem to have everything against them, the Israelites, get delivered.

### **III. Delivered by a Deliverer**

If we view this passage in light of earlier biblical revelation, we can see more of the fulfillment of that foundational passage in Genesis 3:15. God had said there that there would be conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. We have seen how that prophecy begins to be fulfilled in the conflict between the godly line of people, who have now become a nation as the seed of Abraham, and the ungodly line. Pharaoh is clearly in the line of the serpent's seed. Though Pharaoh is not aware of the great prophecy, he acts to fulfill it. He has his reasons for targeting only the male babies, but there is an evil influencer who is acting through Pharaoh. Satan does know the ancient prophecy. He knows that it says of the seed of the woman, **“He shall bruise your head.”** Satan knows that all God's prophecies are to be treated quite seriously, and so he noted that God said “He”, meaning a single male.

Does this story sound familiar? A powerful Gentile king starts killing Jewish male babies. Everything in this story is designed to point to the real deliverer, Jesus. Almost 1500 years later, King Herod would also begin to fear his loss of power, which would lead him to order the execution of all the babies in Bethlehem. But God would preserve his deliverer again. And when he grew to manhood, he would bring a greater deliverance than Moses could ever bring. Moses delivered the Jews from their slavery in Egypt, but Jesus delivers us from the greater slavery of sin.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The story of the exodus doesn't just belong to Israel. It is our story as well. Let's apply it in two ways. First, God is actively working out your salvation even when it appears that he has abandoned you. Baby Moses was placed in a basket and floated down the Nile River. He was the picture of weakness, floating wherever the current took him. But God had not abandoned either Moses or his people. The Lord of the river was not absent, but quietly working to achieve his purpose of redeeming his people. The same is true of us.

Second, remember that Jesus is your Deliverer. He is the true Moses. Just as Moses went into the heart of the kingdom of evil and grew up in Pharaoh's household, so Jesus has gone into the heart of darkness by becoming sin for us. Just as Pharaoh got everything he wanted but ended up losing, Satan got everything he wanted when Jesus died. But it was this very death that caused him to lose completely. So call out to Jesus for deliverance from your taskmasters. He frees us up to serve and worship God, which brings life and joy to us.