

## **God's Covenant Loyalty**

### **Exodus 2:23-25**

#### **Introduction**

When the book of Exodus begins, the narrative quickly moves to the time after the patriarchs died and the children of Israel were enslaved by the Egyptians. This is the context for the birth of Moses and the Ten Plagues brought against Pharaoh and Egypt. Israel was in Egypt and afflicted by the Egyptians just like God had told Abraham they would be (Gen. 15:13-16). God had also told Abraham that He would deliver them out of that land and give to them the land of Canaan. In fact, God's promises to and covenant with Abraham are the reason God gives for why He delivers Israel from Egypt.

#### **Israel in Bondage**

Pharaoh afflicted the people of Israel because he feared them as they multiplied and grew mighty in Egypt. He sought first to simply enslave them, but they only grew more. He then tried to cut off their future strength, commanding that the newborn sons should be killed or drowned in the Nile. They were put to hard, forced labor, and their babies were slaughtered. Moses was born in the midst of this and spared by God's providential hand. Although he is adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh and raised in Pharaoh's house, he ends up fleeing Egypt. After Moses settles in the land of Midian, the text tells us that the cries of the Israelites in Egypt because of their bondage came up to God, and He heard them. God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and it was then that He looked on the Israelites and acknowledged them (Ex. 2:23-25).

#### **Idolatrous Bondage**

We find out later in the Scriptures, however, that Pharaoh's oppression was not the only bondage the Israelites were in at this time. Shortly after they are led out of Egypt by Moses, the Lord says that the Israelites should "no more make sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot" (Lev. 17:7). Later, Joshua, when he gives his well-known "As for me and my house" charge, calls on the people to fear and serve the Lord and to put away the gods which their fathers served in Egypt (Josh. 24:14). Evidently, the Israelites, during their captivity in Egypt, had participated in the idolatry of Egypt. Much later, the prophet Ezekiel makes it most plain. The Lord says that when He revealed Himself to the children of Israel in Egypt, He called on them to put away the abominations and worship of the idols of Egypt. But because they refused to stop their idolatry, the Lord poured out His fury upon them. However, He also checked it for His name's sake, and in the end brought them out of the land of Egypt (Ezek. 20:5-10).

This sheds light on some of the details Scripture includes regarding the Ten Plagues. For the first three plagues, the Lord sends the plague indiscriminately on all the land of Egypt. But beginning with the fourth plague, God makes a difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians (Ex. 8:22-23). God brings the fourth through tenth plagues on Egypt while protecting Israel. The previous passages show that Israel was in bondage not just to Pharaoh but also to the idols of Egypt. The idols had a hold on them, and they were holding onto their idols. God brought the first three plagues on Israel as well as Egypt as a chastisement. But then God made a distinction and spared them. From what we are told in

Exodus and Ezekiel, there is no clear indication that God began to spare Israel because of their repentance. God was merciful to Israel—not giving them the judgment they deserved along with Egypt—for His name’s sake, because He had given a promise to Abraham that He would deliver Abraham’s descendants. He was merciful to Israel because of His word to Abraham, His justice was satisfied (for the time being) by the blood of the Passover lamb, and His grace was made clear as He brought them out of their bondage in Egypt.

### **God’s Covenant Loyalty**

God regards the children of Israel not because they were following Him, not even because they had cried out to Him in repentance. God acknowledges them because He remembered His promise to Abraham. He acknowledges them not because of their words but because of His words. This is for us a picture of the gospel. The New Testament authors make this clear over and over. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). “For when we were still without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Rom. 5:6, 8-9). God saves sinners. God saves idolaters. God saves only those who cannot save themselves. Once God has saved you, He then gives you work to do (Eph. 2:10). Once the blood of the true Passover Lamb has been applied to you, then you are called to actively purge out the old leaven of your sinful heart (1 Cor. 5:7). We must remember that when God saves someone, though, it is only because He is keeping His covenant promise that the Father made with the Son from before the foundations of the earth (Eph. 1:4). Having believed the gospel by means of God’s grace, we must then also believe the promise that God gave to Abraham – “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39; cf. Gen. 17:7). The promise of salvation is grounded on the promise that God will be your God, to a thousand generations (Deut. 5:10, 7:9).

### **Conclusion**

Understanding this grace of God is necessary and powerful for casting off the sin that so easily ensnares us. If God is truly as gracious as all this, then you can be completely and brutally honest with Him about your sin. If God is truly as gracious as all this, then you can take even the shame of your sin before Him, not excusing your sin in any way. The more we embrace God’s grace, the more we despise our sin, the more we flee from it, the more we cast it off. Tasting the grace of God makes our sin distasteful such that we spit it out.

You may ask, How do I know that this grace is for me? There is not a list of names that we can check to see if we will be saved. God knows, but He knows in His infinite wisdom and sovereignty. We must live in our finite bodies, limited in space and time. This does not mean, however, that we cannot know whether we are saved. There are many things to consider regarding our assurance of salvation, but take just one: Jesus said His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:27). Do you hear the call of Jesus? He says repent and believe. Leave behind your idols (daily) and follow Him.