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**Exodus 1:9–22, NLT, edited.**

<sup>9</sup>The Egyptian King said to his people, “Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. <sup>10</sup>We must keep them from growing even more. If we don’t, they will join our enemies and fight against us.” <sup>11</sup>So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves. <sup>12</sup>But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the more alarmed the Egyptians became. <sup>13</sup>So the Egyptians worked the people of Israel without mercy. They were ruthless in all their demands. <sup>20</sup>So God was good and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful. <sup>22</sup>Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Throw every newborn Hebrew boy into the Nile River.”

**Exodus 2:1–10, NLT, edited.**

A man and woman from the tribe of Levi got married. <sup>2</sup>The woman gave birth to a son. <sup>3</sup>But when she could no longer hide him, she got a basket made of papyrus reeds and waterproofed it with tar and pitch. She put the baby in the basket and laid it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile River. <sup>5</sup>Soon Pharaoh’s daughter came down to bathe in the river. When the princess saw the basket among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it for her. <sup>6</sup>When the princess opened it, she saw the baby. The little boy was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This must be one of the Hebrew children,” she said. <sup>10</sup>Later, when the boy was older, the princess named him Moses, for she explained, “I lifted him out of the water.”

**Luke 15:4–7, NLT.**

What of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost? <sup>5</sup>And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup>And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ <sup>7</sup>I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

## **Wandering in the wilderness.**

Exodus 1:9–22 and Exodus 2:1–10 tell a popular Old Testament story. The pharaoh of Egypt has grown very worried about the Israelites. In the Book of Genesis, we were told how the Israelites had come to live in Egypt during a famine. Joseph, one of Jacob’s twelve sons, had been sold into slavery by his brothers and had been brought to Egypt. He then forgave his brothers. To rescue them from a famine, Joseph brought his extended family to Egypt, Joseph having become a high official in the court of the Pharaoh. But now, the Israelites are multiplying quickly while living among the Egyptians. The pharaoh of Egypt grows concerned that soon, the Israelites will outnumber the ethnic Egyptians, and the Israelites will join forces with the military enemies of Egypt. So, the pharaoh makes the Israelites slaves. But this only makes the Israelites stronger. The pharaoh orders his people to be extremely brutal with the Israelites. The author tells us this: <sup>20</sup>*So God was good and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful.* <sup>22</sup>*Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Throw every newborn Hebrew boy into the Nile River.”* Then we are told that two members of the tribe of Levi marry. This tribe is special; they are responsible for the religious leadership and the organization of the Israelites. They are particularly important to the long-term strength and survival of God’s people. We then read this: <sup>2</sup>*The woman became pregnant and gave birth to*

a son. <sup>3</sup> But when she could no longer hide him, she got a basket made of papyrus reeds and waterproofed it with tar and pitch. She put the baby in the basket and laid it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile River. The Pharaoh's daughter happens to go down to the river to bathe. She discovers the baby in the basket and feels sorry for it. She realizes that this is an Israelite baby. She orders an Israelite to have one of their women nurse the baby - but the pharaoh's daughter doesn't realize that the woman chosen is the baby's mother. Mom is actually paid to nurse her own baby. Finally, this transpires: <sup>10</sup> Later, when the boy was older, his mother brought him back to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her own son. The princess named him Moses, for she explained, "I lifted him out of the water."

This is an incredible story about God's protection, about God's loyalty and determination to take care of the faithful. As we know, Moses will be the key person who will secure the future of the Israelite people. Many believe that Moses wasn't an actual historical figure. Perhaps he was. Either way, the story remains powerful. This happens at a critical moment in the life of the Chosen People. Soon they will have to escape their bonds of slavery and find their way across a giant desert, which is called the wilderness, all the way to the Promised Land. God sees to it that a leader is born, and that this leader is protected from all harm. Here's something interesting. We translate Exodus 2:3 to say that the mother of Moses

*made a basket of papyrus reeds and waterproofed it with tar and pitch.* That's not exactly what the Hebrew says. A more precise translation is that she made an "ark of bulrushes" and waterproofed it. The word in question is *tê·baṭ*. The only other place this word is used in the entire Bible is in Genesis 6:14 when Noah is ordered to make an ark before the Great Flood. The author of Exodus is telling us that this basket is no basket: it is an ark that will preserve the Chosen People.

That's how we should all think about ourselves, when we're in a period of panic or fear, when we're nervous about what's happening with us or a loved one. It's during those times when the future is unknown and there is significant risk, that's when we see ourselves in our little arks, waterproofed with tar and pitch, floating down the river – and knowing that this is all planned by God.

When I was a boy, I spent a brief period, perhaps as much as a year, as a Boy Scout. I could hike okay. Like all Los Angeles Boy Scouts, I was very good at cooking TV dinners over a campfire. I did just fine on my air mattress in my tent, camping in southern California, perhaps a mile or so from the safety of cement and steel. I went on an extended camping trip a couple of times. Once, as I was riding in the bus inland, far up into the hills to the east of where we lived, I remember feeling a little woozy. I hoped that I wasn't coming down with anything, because it's no fun to be sick on a camping trip. Well, when I got there, I was running one hell of a

fever. My first day there, I wandered off in a daze, got lost, and spent the night alone. I was scared and desperately tried to find my way back. Meanwhile, back at the camp, all the adults and Scouts were looking for me. I'll get back to this.

Let's look at our Bible story again. We read that the Egyptian princess *named him Moses, for she explained, "I lifted him out of the water."* Traditionally, this is thought to be the meaning of the name Moses: "to put out" or "to draw out". But research suggests that the name may be an Egyptian word that means "conceived by a god", or "conceived by God". Moses is arguably the most important human character in the Old Testament, or at least in the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. He is a ruler, a judge, a law giver, a prophet, and a healer. He is even part savior. He speaks to God face to face. He leads his people from slavery through the wilderness to the Holy Land. He transmits the Ten Commandments from God to humanity. He, at the foot of Mt. Sinai, teaches a new generation of believers - those born in the desert - the essentials of their faith. As a historical figure, he is credited with writing the entire Torah or Pentateuch. The last lines of Deuteronomy, after describing the death of Moses, say this:

*<sup>10</sup> There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. <sup>11</sup> The LORD sent him to perform all the miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, and all his servants, and his entire land. <sup>12</sup> With mighty power, Moses performed terrifying acts in the sight of all Israel.*

The same protection that God gave the Chosen People through Moses is freely given to us - individually. Consider again the last lines of Deuteronomy. These are the last words in the fifth book of the Torah, the body of divine revelation to the people of Israel. This is how the holy book of the Chosen People ends, not with a whimper, oh, Moses is dead and that is that. Again, the story of Moses begins with describing the incredible extent of God's power and then the Torah ends with this amazing statement about the value of Moses to the Chosen People:<sup>10</sup> *There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.*

Each of us is also here for a reason. That reason is to love God, to love all those made in God's image, which is all people, of course, and to walk in the Kingdom of God today and for all of eternity. As we do this, we will make many mistakes. We will need rescuing over and over. God will always be there when we call out for forgiveness and regeneration.

That day when I was running a high fever, I wandered in a delirious state, trying aimlessly to find my way back to camp. I have no idea how far I wandered, but I walked for a very long time. It got dark and I continued to wander. I prayed, asking God to help me find my way back. I stopped multiple times, then shakily fell to me knees, and looked up through the stars at God. It started to rain. California

is essentially a desert, like the Israeli wilderness, and I was in a very sparse evergreen forest. I found a tight cluster of trees and worked my way into the middle of them, to try to get away from the rain. Finally, wedged in a group of maybe ten trees, I laid down in the middle of them. When I woke up in the morning, the rain had stopped, and although the terrain around the trees was wet, I was dry. I was very sick. I was dazed, but oddly calm. I asked God to please help me get back to camp. I then stood up and began walking through the wilderness. I found my way out of the tiny cluster of trees, and after walking maybe twenty yards, I discovered that I was in the camp. I had spent the night within the bounds of the camp, not far from the tent in which I was supposed to sleep. Of course, kids and adults started yelling my name and running toward me. I ended up in a hospital.

When the Egyptians were chasing the Chosen people as they fled Egypt, they found themselves trapped at the Red Sea with the Egyptians behind them. The people began to despair and wanted to go back and be slaves again. They got angry at Moses for putting them in this predicament. They said to him: *“Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren’t there enough graves for us in Egypt? What have you done to us? Why did you make us leave Egypt?”* But Moses knew all about God’s protection. He replied to his people: *“Don’t be afraid. Just stand still and watch the LORD rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will*

*never be seen again.* <sup>14</sup> *The LORD himself will fight for you. Just stay calm.*” It was then that Moses raised his hand over the sea, and with the help of God, spread the waters apart so that his people could escape. Moses knew all about the protection of God. It began when he was a baby. His faith did indeed fade at times. He wasn’t always sure in his trust in God. But when his people needed his leadership, he was indeed fully confident. He was God’s vehicle for getting God’s People to their home.

I did not have Moses’ confidence that God would help me when I was lost in the woods. But God did protect me. All I had to do was ask. That’s all we must do.

God saved Moses so that Moses could serve as God’s prophet, leading the people out of Egypt as they wandered in the wilderness and then entered the promised land – all to keep God’s commitment to rescue all the Chosen People by giving them their own land. That was the ultimate Old Testament rescue: granting God’s promise of a homeland, as well as progeny and God’s blessing. But to us, as Christians living under the New Covenant, we live in the Kingdom of God wherever we are. We do not need Christian land. What we have is the promise that God will rescue us no matter where we are. And that promise is an individual one. God doesn’t rescue Christians as a group by giving us things. God rescues each of us – and each of us takes on the highest priority when we are lost and need God’s forgiveness and regeneration. In the Gospel of Luke, this parable is told by Jesus:

*What of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost? <sup>5</sup> And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' <sup>7</sup> I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.*

That is a critical difference between the Old and the New Testament: God rescues each of us individually. God leads each of us through the wilderness to safety. Our Covenant isn't between the Christian people and God; it is between God and each of us individually. That is the New Covenant brought to us by God. God leads us through the wilderness of life and into the Kingdom of God, which is our home forever. And, very importantly, while we are on Earth, anytime we are lost, all we have to do is call out to God for rescuing. God will drop everything and come after us. It's easy to call to God when we are physically lost or broke or out of a job. It's easy to call to God when we are in earthly trouble. The important thing is to remember that we must call out to God when we are spiritually lost, when our consciences tell us that we haven't been doing what God wants us. Pray with me:

*God, guide us, bless us, remind us of your presence every single day. Never let us forget that the moment we are in need, the moment we reach out to you, we will become the most important thing on your mind. We know that we can always count on your presence and your power, even when we have done wrong. Amen.*