

BELIEVER'S BIBLE BULLETIN

Believer's Chapel · 6420 Churchill Way · Dallas, Texas 75230

The Providence of God

Series: EXODUS
April 13, 1975

Wm. J. McRae

Lesson 2
Ex. 2:1-22

Introduction

It was W. H. Griffith Thomas, an Episcopal scholar, theologian and writer, and one of the founders of Dallas Theological Seminary, who once wrote: "Cultivate the habit of investing every detail of life with significance."

Unbelievable as this may seem, it is surely true. There is a special significance to every detail of your life. This is the essence of the doctrine of divine providence. If this term should be unfamiliar to you, let me take a moment to define it. Divine providence simply means, "God's continued activity in the world for the realization of His plan." (L. Berkhof) That is, it is God's continuous involvement in all the details of this world, of this country, of your lives. He is involved in all those details for the purpose of working out and fulfilling His eternal and all-wise plan.

Few chapters of our Bible bear stronger witness to the providence of God than Exodus 2. The first twenty-two verses of this chapter:

- span the first 80 of Moses' 120 years (Acts 7:23, 30)
- cover the first two of the 3 major periods of Moses' life
 1. Scholar in Egypt - 40 years (Acts 7:23)
 2. Shepherd in Midian - 40 years (Acts 7:30)
 3. Savior of Israel - 40 years (Acts 7:36)
- touch on four incidents that witness to the providence of God

I. The Providence of God in the Birth of Moses 2:1-9

Although it is not recognized as such when it occurs, the birth of Moses is a most important event for Israel. In the land of Goshen, a district of Egypt, there dwells among the children of Israel a small family. The father is Amram, the mother is Jochebed (Exodus 6:20). Both are of the tribe of Levi. Their first child is a daughter. Her name is Miriam (2:4). Their second child is a son. His name is Aaron. He is now three years old (7:7).

Since the birth of Aaron, the Pharaoh in Egypt has imposed a new and more severe form of oppression. To all the people in the land, the decree has been delivered to destroy all new-born Hebrew males by drowning them

in the waters of the Nile (1:22). And now, Amram and Jochebed have their third child - a baby boy!

Our text says: "and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months" (v. 2). But that is hardly the full story. Why does she hide her son? To trace it to the love of the mother or the beauty of the baby hardly stands the test of Scripture. Hebrews 11:23 tells us "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict." This is an exercise of faith!

Apparently the parents had received some direct communication from God informing them of the birth of the son, perhaps even of his ultimate mission, and instructing them what to do. They believe God and act accordingly. Their faith sees he is a goodly and beautiful child - in the sight of God. More than that, their faith overcomes their fear of Pharaoh. Choosing to obey God rather than man, they defy the king's decree and hide him in their house for three months. When he can be no longer hidden at home, they make a chest, cover it with asphalt or slime (bitumen, Gen. 11:3), put the baby boy in the box, and set it among the long papyrus reeds in the shallow water of the Nile where there will be no current to carry it away, little chance of crocodiles and less chance of ever being spotted. This speaks of the strength of their faith. I would have carried him as far away from the water as possible! They hide him along the shallow shore line and strategically place Miriam up the bank to watch the precious box.

But this is all more than happenstance. It is the providence of God. Every detail is significant in God's providence.

- He is born at this specific time.
- He is hidden on this particular day, in this particular spot.
- Pharaoh's daughter, Hatshepsut, comes on this particular day, to this particular spot, to bathe.
- Hatshepsut sees the treasure box, retrieves it, opens it, and has compassion upon the precious contents. She calls the baby "Moses" - a pun based on a similar sound with the active participle of the Hebrew verb masa - "pulling out."
- Miriam is present and attentive. She rises to the emergency and offers to call a woman from among the Hebrews to nurse the child for her.
- A nurse is arranged from among the Hebrew women - Jochebed, the infant's own mother. "It probably appealed to the robust Hebrew sense of humor that she was spoiling the Egyptians by receiving pay for nursing her own child."

Every detail is significant. Here is God's continuous activity for the realization of his plan. But what is the divine purpose behind such providence? Surely it is two-fold. First, the preservation of the chosen deliverer of God's people. By these providential circumstances Moses was preserved from certain death. This is often the purpose of God's providence in the lives of His elect before their conversion. I have a friend who miraculously escaped from an aircraft which crashed into the cold waters of the Atlantic off Boston. A short time later she was converted to Christ. It was the providence of God preserving the life of one of His elect before her conversion.

Second, the instruction of the chosen deliverer of God's people. In the home of Amram and Jochebed he learned of the God of his fathers (3:15)

and that the Hebrews were his true countrymen (2:11). His initial training came from godly parents who laid a spiritual foundation and sowed the spiritual seed. God was even now training and preparing Moses for his ultimate calling. How wise is the providence of God - often even in our early years, the years before our conversion.

"Cultivate the habit of investing every detail of life with significance" even the details of your early life, your pre-conversion days, your birth.

The providence of God is seen, however, not only in the birth of Moses, but also in the training of Moses in Egypt.

II. The Providence of God in the Training of Moses in Egypt 2:10

Between verses 10 and 11 comes the training of Moses in Egypt. Two New Testament passages throw light on this period. The first focuses upon his training.

A. "And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians"
Acts 7:22

Through archaeology and related studies, great light has been shed upon his boyhood and education in Egypt. As he grew older, he became more involved in formal education:

- reading and writing the hieroglyphic script
- copying of texts
- instruction in writing letters and formal documents
- learning the languages and geography of Canaan
- studying contemporary codes of Law (eg. Hammurabi's)

Once again, every detail of this part of his life must be invested with significance. Pharaoh planned to deal wisely with the sons of Israel (1:10). Yet, God compels him to give board, lodging and education to the very man which accomplished the very thing Pharaoh was trying to prevent. Pharaoh's wisdom turned to foolishness. Out of what Pharaoh intends for evil, God brings great good. Pharaoh pays the bill for an education beyond the means of Amram but indispensable to Moses' ministry. God is preparing Moses for his authorship of the Pentateuch, his leadership of Israel, his administration of the Mosaic covenant and legal code.

While at college, in his unconverted days, Dr. S. L. Johnson Jr. was dedicated to golf. It was during those days that he began to study Greek, primarily because it was offered at a time that did not conflict with his golf. Behind this, however, was the providence of God preparing one of his elect, even before his conversion, for his appointed ministry. Many years later he became a professor of New Testament literature and exegesis.

From the perspective of God training His servants for His service, there is no detail of life that cannot be invested with significance!

At forty years of age Moses' period of training in Egypt comes to a close. He has learned what God has for him to learn in Pharaoh's court. He is about to be graduated by God. How does this come about? It is by

4

means of a crisis decision made by Moses at this time in his life.

B. Hebrews 11:24-26

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward."

Because he was looking to the reward of faith and obedience He considered the reproach and suffering with Christ greater riches than all the wealth of Egypt Therefore, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. What renunciation! As the only adopted son of Hatshepsut, he was successor to the throne. Yet he refused the wealth, honors and throne of Egypt. Why? If he had accepted, he would have freed the Hebrews from their bondage. Why then, does he refuse? Again, the providence of God is the answer. God's purpose is more than deliverance from bondage. It is the removal of the Hebrews from Egypt, the formation of a nation and their settlement in the land of promise. In Moses' great act of self-renunciation God is active working out His wise purposes for Israel.

This crucial decision of Moses triggers an incident which becomes an important turning point in his life. It is the third incident in our chapter, a further illustration of the providence of God.

III. The Providence of God in the Sin of Moses 2:11-15

What can be said of Moses' murder of the Egyptian? On the positive side: It was certainly an outward expression of his righteous indignation for the plight of his fellow Hebrews. It was a sincere expression of his love for his own people. It clearly indicated his rejection of the pleasures of Egypt. It revealed his readiness to assume the responsibility of deliverer of Israel which, apparently, he sensed even at this early stage of his life.

And yet, his deed cannot be condoned. It was sinful. His impulse to save Israel was not wrong, but the action he took was. His intention was good but his deed was ill-advised. He was impatient, in too big a hurry, running before God. He acts in the energy of the flesh.

The incident impresses upon us two oft-forgotten truths. First, God's timing is important. The Hebrews were not yet assured of his leadership. God was not yet ready to deliver His people. Like an impatient horse, Moses rushes ahead of the Lord. Second, God's ways are important. Deliverance was not only imperative but imminent. But God's way was not insurrection, rebellion and revolution. If Moses had waited upon God, he would soon have learned how God intended it to be done. Moses' way led to distrust among his fellow Hebrews and the threat of death from Pharaoh. In the face of such a threat, Moses flees from Egypt, eastward, to the region of Midian (v. 15).

Surely this incident taxes our thesis to its very limit. Can every detail really be invested with significance? Yes, even the sinful acts of men are under the providence of God. He permits our sinful nature to manifest itself freely (e.g. Sale of Joseph into slavery, crucifixion

of Christ). God permits Moses' sinful nature to express itself in the murder of the Egyptian. He could have prevented it. Rather, He permits it! Why?

It was an indispensable lesson in Moses' spiritual education. Failure always is! It is God's way of preparing us to learn deep and significant truths. Moses had to learn to wait for God. He had to learn the importance of doing things in God's time and in God's way. He had to learn that doing things in his way, in his time, in the energy of the flesh led only to disaster. God allowed him to fail, allowed his sinful nature to function unchecked. It was an important preparation for learning the spiritual truths that made him a great man of God.

Although God in His providence often restrains evil, just as often, it seems, He permits some sin to manifest itself fully. When He so acts in His providence He overrules the evil for the fulfillment of His plan. He brings good out of the evil. Just so in the case of Moses' sin. He is forced out of Egypt into the desert of Midian for a post-graduate course in all the wisdom of God - a course designed to prepare Him further for his role as leader and deliverer of Israel.

This brings us, then, to the fourth incident which witnesses to God's wise providence.

IV. The Providence of God in the Training of Moses in Midian 2:16-22

It was at a particularly critical moment that Moses made his appearance at the main watering-well of the Midianites. The shepherds of the area had converged upon the well. They were not the only ones at the well however. There were already there the seven daughters of Reuel, the priest of Midian, with their flocks. As the men are driving the women and their flocks away from the well, Moses comes to their assistance. Single-handed he withstands the shepherds, befriends the daughters of Reuel and wins the esteem of their father. Here a home is provided for him during his exile from Egypt. In due course, he married one of the daughters, Zipporah, who later bore him a son, Gershom. For forty years Moses lives here in Midian with the family of Reuel, tending his flocks in the fields.

Simple and common though it seems, every detail of this part of his life is again to be invested with significance.

The heroic and courageous assistance to the defenseless daughters opens the door to a home during the time of his exile. It is a home among the Midianites - descendants of Abraham by Keturah. These were actual kinsman from the same stock. Surely they were worshippers of God too. More than this, it is in the home of Reuel, a priest. He may have been a priest of the true God (18:12-23). Think of it. After forty years of the learning of Egypt's wisdom, God places him for another 40 years among the worshippers of God for his further maturity and reflection upon the things of God (Acts 7:29 ff.). How wise the providence of God!

But that is not all. While in Midian, Moses labors - undoubtedly a new experience for the son of Pharaoh's daughter. This discipline of physical toil was a necessary preparation for his future ministry - absolutely indispensable. And what was his labor? For forty years he was a shepherd. God was preparing Moses to be a leader of men. How? By forty years experience leading flocks. His education in the fields of Midian included course after course on rounding up strays, keeping the

flock together, preventing rebels from wandering away, leading them into places of pasture and refreshment, protecting them from vicious wild animals, waiting patiently for stragglers to catch up, and binding up bleeding wounds. Here God cultivated those qualities of leadership that made him one of the world's great leaders of men. In the providence of God, for forty years he led stupid, defenseless, weak sheep.

Conclusion

"Cultivate the habit of investing every detail of life with significance." Why? Because in the providence of God it is significant! It may be God's means

- of cultivating a quality of Christlike character
- of preparing you for some future responsibility
- of preparing you for some imminent danger
- of surfacing some flaws and faults
- of creating some need - the ingredient for growth
- of evangelizing one of His elect.

When we see the significance of these details, we accept them with praise and thanksgiving. He is causing all things to work together for good. But what if we do not see the significance? We still have to accept them with praise, believing He is causing all things to work together for good.

"Cultivate the habit of investing every detail of life with significance."

It is within the all-wise and purposeful providence of God that

- You live in Dallas, not Colorado or New York.
- Your home is in its particular area, on its particular street, between those two particular homes.
- You work in that particular office, with those particular men.
- You suffer from the particular affliction that plagues your body.
- You lost that contract or investment last week.
- Your application was accepted or rejected.
- You're in that particular class with that particular teacher, with those particular students.
- Last, but by no means least, you are here this morning, in Believers Chapel, to hear the word of God and the Good News of Jesus Christ.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).