

[R3987 : page 137]

A LESSON ON DIVINE PROVIDENCE

– EXODUS 2:1-15. – MAY 26. –

Golden Text: – "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds." – Acts 7:22.

OF the greatness of Moses the renowned Gladstone said: –

"We have in the history of Moses a great and powerful genius, an organizing, constructing mind. Moses belongs to the great class of nation-makers; to a class of men who have a place by themselves in the history of politics, and who are among the rarest and highest of the phenomena of our race."

Another says: –

"He was great as a lawmaker and organizer, a general, a historian, a poet, an orator, and a saint who walked with God. It is not too much to say that our modern civilization [R3987 : page 138] is built upon his work. And his greatness is enhanced enormously when we remember that his only material was a disorganized horde of emancipated slaves, encamped in a desert. Probably the majority of thinkers would rate Moses as the greatest man of earliest history."

FOREORDAINED OF GOD A LEADER

The proper view of Moses' career must surely take into account that he was a special servant of God and under special divine providence. While this view may not commend itself to the world, it surely does increase the interest of all who are in heart accord with the teachings of the divine Word. We shall see that all of the Lord's providences regulated the affairs of this wonderful man from his earliest infancy; and some of us may see still further that there was an interposition of divine providence

in respect to the development of the babe even before its birth. Saint Paul, who was another of those remarkable characters whose interests were superintended by divine power, said of himself that the Lord "called me from my mother's womb." The inference we draw from this statement is that the Apostle recognized that certain traits of character and disposition were his from the moment of his birth – traits and dispositions which specially prepared him for his subsequent work as a minister of the Gospel. Applying this principle to Moses, we may well attribute much of the fineness and breadth of character and the extreme humility of this "meekest man in all the earth" to prenatal influences.

He was born so: God had him in mind as a suitable one for his purposes, and equipped him with those qualities so necessary to one whom he would so largely use in so great a work as the deliverance of his people from the bondage of Egypt. Nothing in this implies a divine interference with free moral agency. As it was possible for the Apostle Paul to have declined to preach the Gospel, and even to have repudiated the Lord and be a "castaway," so also it was possible for Moses to have repudiated his mission and to have chosen the pleasures of sin for a season. Had either of these men taken the wrong course we may be sure that the divine plan would not have been interfered with, so diverse is the wisdom and power of God. Another could have been raised up to do the work of the Apostle or the work of Moses, and divine providence could have so arranged for their instruction and development that the divine plan would have suffered no loss. Nevertheless, so complete, we may be sure, were the arrangements of God in respect to Saint Paul and Moses, that it was more natural for them to take the course which they chose than to have taken the opposite one.

HIDDEN IN THE BULRUSHES

As we begin to look for divine providence in the affairs of Moses we find them standing out at every juncture. He was born at that particular time when Pharaoh Rameses II. had laid commands upon all the Hebrew parents that their male children should be promptly strangled at the time of birth, under dire penalties upon themselves and the child they would permit to live. We know not how long this law remained in effect, but it served in this particular juncture to introduce Moses into the royal family by a most remarkable chain of circumstances. Miriam, his sister, was born about nine years before, and Aaron, his brother, in time to escape this law; and when Moses was born his mother "saw that he was a goodly child, and hid him three months." Apparently there was something extraordinary in the appearance of the child, not only in the eyes of its own parents but also in those of the princess who subsequently adopted him. Stephen says of him, "He was exceeding fair," – margin, "fair to God," (Acts 7:20) – and Josephus recounts that as a man he was so handsome that passers-by would turn to gaze after him, and even laborers forgot their tasks in the spell of his rare beauty.

To hide the child for three months must have been quite a task, especially when the law respecting infants was known and probably a reward offered for the detection of those evading it. At last it was necessary for the mother to part with the babe, and the ark or basket made of bulrushes was prepared and overspread on the outside with pitch to keep it dry. With the babe therein it was placed near the bank of the river amongst the rushes, which would prevent it from floating down the stream and hide it from the curious. The spot was selected, too, somewhere near the royal palace, and near that portion of the river set apart for bathing for the use of the royal family, and at a time when the princess was known to take her daily bath. The location was [R3988 : page 138] on the river Nile. Rawlinson says: –

"The capital of Egypt, the abode of the royal family at that time, was most probably Memphis, occupying nearly the site on which now stands the great city of Cairo. The household of Amram dwelt under the shadow of the three great pyramids, those 'artificial mountains,' the most impressive monuments that have ever been raised by human hands."

BROUGHT FORTH – FROM THE WATER

In harmony with the expectation Pharaoh's daughter took her usual bath on the day in which Moses was placed in the ark amongst the rushes, and at an opportune moment the babe cried. The princess is said to have been a married woman but childless, and we may well imagine the interest and curiosity aroused in her heart and the hearts of her maidens in attendance when the cry of the babe was heard. An attendant brought the ark and opened it before the princess, and the weeping babe excited the compassion of the womanly heart. At once she guessed the truth, that this must be a Hebrew child, whose parents, unwilling to strangle it, had disposed of it in this manner, perhaps in hope.

Watching at a distance, little Miriam, Moses' sister, then about nine years of age, following her instructions, ran to see the find and to promptly propose to the princess that she might get one of the Hebrew women to act as a nurse for the child. This was approved, and of course Miriam called the mother. The princess gave direction that the nurse should take full charge of him and receive pay for so doing. Thus the family fortunes were helped, and at the same time full protection assured, for the child was recognized as the adopted son of the princess. It is supposed that about seven years elapsed before Moses was brought to the princess, and that meantime he enjoyed the care and instruction of a godly mother. Meantime, we know not just when, the princess gave the child the name Moses, which signifies, "delivered from the water." Some translate **[R3988 : page**

139] the word to mean, "born from the water," supposing that the princess probably meant by this to signify that she had borne Moses as her son, borne him from the water.

To those who have eyes of faith to see it, there is a great chain of providential circumstances here; to others, who have no such eyes, these were merely accidents and happen-sos. Each one of course will be strongly convinced of the correctness of his own view, but in this case as in many others truth is stranger than fiction, and all these things were, under divine providence, working together for the accomplishment of the divine purpose in connection with that child, with that man, and with the nation which God intended he should subsequently lead out of bondage as the typical people of God. Dean Alford expresses this thought beautifully in the words, –

"The bark is wafted to the strand by breath divine,
And on the helm there rests another hand than mine."

"MIGHTY IN WORD AND DEED"

Our Golden Text from Stephen's discourse reminds us that "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and deeds." What a wonderful preparation that wonderful boy needed in order to make of him the great Captain of the Lord's hosts. Egypt at that time had two great universities, one at Heliopolis, the other at Hermopolis. Moses is said to have been instructed in the former, situated about twenty miles north of Memphis. Giekie describing it says: "Shady cloisters opened into lecture rooms for the students and quiet houses for the professors and priests, in their many grades and offices." Another writer says: "A splendid library was at his disposal. The library of the Rameseum at Thebes – a structure built by Rameses II. – contained 20,000 books."

It seems almost a miracle that the boy Moses could pass through such experiences as he had in the palace and in the school without being seriously injured by the vain philosophies prevailing and honored in these places. Evidently, however, he was not only well born as respected his religious instincts, but the influence of his mother, his nurse, undoubtedly had much to do with shaping his child mind and holding him firm in the faith of the Hebrew – the faith in the Oath-Bound Abrahamic Covenant, to the effect that his race at some time would be blessed by the Lord and made very great, influential in the world, and thus be the divine channel for the blessing of all the families of the earth. At all events we have every indication that Moses was not only not spoiled by his education, in the sense of having his faith overthrown, but that his natural modesty, humility, meekness, continued with him to manhood's estate.

WHEN MOSES WAS GROWN

This date according to the Scriptures was his fortieth year, for the life of Moses was divided into three distinct parts of forty years each. An eminent writer says, "According to Josephus, the Ethiopians made an incursion into Egypt and routed the army that was sent to resist them. Panic spread over the country, and Pharaoh trembled at the approach of the swarthy savages. The oracles, well aware of his remarkable abilities, advised that the command be entrusted to Moses. He immediately took the field, surprised the enemy, defeated them with heavy slaughter, drove them back into their own territory and followed them up so hard, capturing one city after another, that they found no asylum until they reached the swamp-girdled city of Meroe. Moses is said to have returned from this campaign the most popular man in the kingdom, having also learned thoroughly the weakness and strength of the people and of Pharaoh."

MOSES THE PATRIOT

The favor enjoyed as the adopted son of the princess in the palace and throughout the land did not quench the sympathy and patriotism of Moses' heart. He perceived the injustice heaped upon his brethren, and in his sympathy for one of them he smote a taskmaster so that he killed him. He buried him in the sand, thinking that nothing further would come of this, that his brethren the Hebrews would be helped to that extent, and that they would surely keep the secret of his favor and defence. In this, however, he found himself mistaken, for when endeavoring to correct a dispute between two Hebrews the fact that he was the murderer of an Egyptian was flung in his face by the one who was at fault. Soon the word reached everywhere, even to the king, who began quietly, as the Hebrew word signifies, to seek an opportunity for slaying Moses – not so easy a matter, however, as the latter was very popular; but in fear Moses, beginning the second fortieth year of his life, fled into the land of Midian, where he remained for forty years, returning for the deliverance of his people when he was eighty years of age.

We cannot say as some might that each child, each youth, each man, by giving attention to the divine guidance, might become a Moses. Very few are prepared by nature and providence for so exalted a position, and generally there are comparatively few opportunities for them. Israel did not need more than one Moses. We can, however, say that divine providence has a general charge of all the affairs of his people. If it is not in our province to be a Moses, it is a part of the Lord's providence to be one of his people, to be cared for by the Lord through a Moses, through a Deliverer. We cannot all be reared in palaces and educated in great institutions of learning nor become mighty in word and deed, but we should each look for the leadings of divine providence in our own experiences and be glad to fill any position marked out to us therein, assured that, –

"God's providence is kind and large;
Both man and beast his bounty share.
The whole creation is his charge,
But saints are his peculiar care."

But while we cannot occupy so prominent a place in earthly affairs as did Moses, let us look to the divine providences in the affairs of our lives, and let us note that still greater privileges, opportunities and honors are ours through Christ.

If the adoption of Moses by Pharaoh's daughter was a remarkable matter, much more wonderful is our own experience in that God first of all redeemed us by the precious blood of Christ, and then without our consent and upon our consecration adopted us into his family as the Bride of his Son, to be "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together." (Rom. 8:17.) There is nothing in all the novels and romances in the world that in any degree [R3988 : page 140] compares with the marvels of this glorious grace of God bestowed upon consecrated believers of this Gospel age. Do we really believe it? So surely as we do the effect will be manifested in our words and thoughts and doings. Imagine a young peasant woman invited to become the bride of a king of a prominent earthly throne: would not the thought of her espousal and the coming honors and blessings and privileges fill her heart almost to the exclusion of every other subject? Would not the preparation for the wedding day be to her and to her friends the all-absorbing topic of interest, engaging time, talent, influence, attention, in every sense of the word? And yet all this would be to a view of an earthly honor that might be very fleeting, with a prospect of earthly happiness; or it might prove bitterly disappointing, and at the very most, and considered from the most advantageous standpoint, could only be a blessing for a few years.

Compare this with the glorious prospects that are set before the Lord's espoused virgin Church – glory, honor, [R3989 : page 140] immortality, eternal life with him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood and with the Father. Truly those who really believe this message, who recognize of a truth that they have been begotten to the new nature and have received the spirit of espousal – surely these could have no greater power and influence operate in their lives to sanctify them and separate them from the world, and to bring them into close fellowship of spirit with their Redeemer. Another thought: As Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and proved himself mighty in words and deeds, so those whom the Lord is now selecting for joint-heirship in the kingdom of his dear Son are required to learn lessons in the great school of experience, in the school of Christ, and they are required to manifest character and be overcomers – strong in the Lord and in the power of his might – mighty in words and in deeds for the Lord and for the Truth. And thank God, however humble our speech, or insignificant our station, he is reckoning these matters to us according to our attitude of heart; and the smallest word or act done through loyalty to him and to principles of righteousness is counted as mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of error, and to the establishment ultimately of the Kingdom of God under the whole heaven.
