

ASSUREDLY GOD WAS WITH HIM

– EXODUS 3:1-14. – JUNE 2. –

Golden Text: – "And he said, Certainly I will be with thee."
– V. 12.

UNDOUBTEDLY God's providences had to do with the general character of Moses, even before his birth, as well as with his educational training for the great work he was intended to perform. Nevertheless we see it would be quite contrary to all divine usages for the Almighty to have coerced his free moral agency. The natural trend of character being developed, it was necessary for Moses himself to decide respecting its use. The central feature of this lesson is that, with all the preparation and all the fitness of the man Moses for the great work of delivering Israel from Egypt, the secret of his success lay in the fact that God was with him – God was the Deliverer of Israel; Moses was merely his servant and representative in connection with the work, as the Lord himself declared – "I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

LONG YEARS IN PREPARATION

When we consider the eighty years of Moses' life, in which he was in preparation for the great work of the Lord, it helps us to appreciate better the fact that our God is never in haste – "Known unto the Lord are all his works from the foundation of the world." He has no need for haste; he knows the end from the beginning, and every feature of the divine plan is properly timed. Thus 4000 years and more passed before Jesus was born, and yet the Scriptures assure us that it was in due time that God sent forth his Son, born of a woman. (Gal. 4:4.) This thought should give us great confidence in the certainty of the development of the Lord's

plans at the proper time. He is not a man that he should err in judgment; he is working all things according to the counsel of his own will. In this thought all his true people may rest in confidence; whether matters seem to culminate rapidly or slowly, each feature will be in its "due time." Although so much time was consumed in preparation for the deliverance of Israel, yet when the appropriate hour was come, in that one morning the whole nation started to move. Let us all learn the lesson more and more to wait on the Lord, and then to be ready to move promptly when he indicates that his appointed time has arrived.

EIGHTY YEARS OF SCHOOLING

The life of Moses is divided into three parts of equal length. The first forty years brought him to ripe manhood and made him familiar with all the learning of the Egyptians. The second forty years began when he fled after killing the Egyptian and had found that his brethren were not prepared for deliverance nor willing to accept his assistance as their friend and brother, and ended when he returned to Israel, under the divine direction, and successfully led them forth from Egypt. The third forty-year period of his life, beginning with the exodus, terminated with his death at the end of the forty years in the wilderness, just as the people of Israel were about to cross over into Canaan. The period of Moses' life from forty to eighty years of age was spent as a shepherd in the service of his father-in-law Jethro, otherwise called Ruel. We may be sure that in that long period of time this meek man, who was ready to do with his might whatever his hands found to do, had large opportunities for learning lessons of patience.

Doubtless like David, the shepherd, Moses learned to think of the sheep and his care over them, and to consider God the great Shepherd of his flock, and probably often wondered why, after giving the gracious promise to Abraham, God had left his flock, the children of Abraham, in apparently hopeless bondage.

Doubtless, too, he thought of his own endeavor to help the people, and how they had shown such a spirit of discord as made it impossible for him to aid [R3989 : page 141] them as he would. Doubtless he had thought many times of how it would have advantaged his own earthly interests had he followed the course marked out for him by his foster-mother, Pharaoh's daughter, and remained a member of the royal family of Egypt and a sharer in the honor and dignity of those who oppressed his people. Doubtless he thought of how he had apparently blighted his entire life and spoiled all of his earthly prospects by his desire to do good to his brethren – his desire to serve their best interests. Doubtless he thought of their ingratitude and failure to appreciate him, their resentment of his kindly-meant assistance, saying, "Who made thee a ruler or judge over us?"

Probably in the mind of Moses the matter resolved itself in the thought that he had done his duty, the best he knew how to do, although the entire matter had resulted in failure; and it is probable he was more or less despondent respecting the future, as a meek, humble-minded man would be apt to feel. Meantime under the Lord's providence he went hither and thither with his flocks and herds to the very land in which later on he was to lead the people of Israel. In those forty years he must have become very familiar with the vicinity of Sinai and lower Palestine. Little did he know the value of the teachings he was then learning. The lesson in all this for us is faithfulness to God and to duty as he gives us to see it, leaving all the results with him. Another lesson is that present experiences, trials and difficulties may be fitting and preparing us for a future useful service for the Lord and his people, even though at the time we see no relationship or connection between the two.

THE BURNING BUSH

Here our lesson opens, showing Moses at eighty years of age shepherding his flock on the rearward side of Mount Horeb,

called Mount Sinai, where subsequently the law was given. As Moses looked, behold a bush burned near him, supposedly a thorn-bush, which sometimes grows to quite a height and quite a thickness in that country, and is known as shittim wood – the kind of wood used in the construction of the Tabernacle. As Moses looked at the flame he perceived that the bush was not consumed, and considering this a most remarkable phenomenon he turned aside and drew near to it to observe the matter. It was then that the Lord spoke to him from the midst of the burning bush, and Moses at once knew that what he had witnessed was a miracle by which the Lord would attract his attention with a view to communicating some important lesson.

God usually has a symbolical meaning in every miracle, and in this one the representation is supposed to be Israel in the midst of tribulation, yet not consumed. Later on, in Reformation times, the Church of Scotland appropriated this burning bush as its emblem on its banner, because its experience had been similar in that it had passed through severe afflictions and distresses and trials, yet had not been consumed. And is not the burning bush a good illustration of the experience of Christ and all of his members? Are they not indeed surrounded by fiery trials? and do they not emerge from these unscathed, uninjured? – on the contrary, blessed, developed, strengthened, made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light?

Well do the Scriptures declare that the fear, reverence, of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. We greatly deplore the growth of irreverence in our day, and urge upon all of our readers for themselves and for their families the cultivation of this proper attitude of mind, so helpful to our preparation for the life that now is and that which is to come. Liberty and independence, while excellent qualities, are always to be valued and conserved and protected, are never to become license, never to lead in any degree to irreverence. This is the more necessary to us for two

reasons: (1) Because of the growing irreverence of the world about us, born of a declining faith in God and everything supernatural; (2) because of our growing enlightenment in the [R3990 : page 141] Truth, by which we see that the fears of an eternity of torture were groundless, there is a danger of losing that proper reverence for God which belongs to and is an integral part of love.

The Prophet David writes, "Keep thy foot when thou goest into the house of God" – take heed to your standing, take heed to your walk, take heed to your conduct. Whether the house of God be a great temple, as in past times, under divine direction, or whether it be the temple of God, which is the Church of Christ in the flesh, we should realize that reverence is befitting to us in connection with everything that is holy and consecrated. We should realize that whoever neglects the cultivation of reverence in respect to these matters is making his own pathway slippery and dangerous. He who reverences little and is careless is much more likely to stumble, to fall, and be utterly cast down. If even Moses, the "meekest man in all the earth," needed from the Lord as his first instruction a lesson of humility, shall we not suppose that such a lesson is necessary to us? Yea, verily!

Let us honor the Lord in our hearts, in our outward demeanor. Whether we bow to give thanks for our daily bread, whether we bow our knee night and morning in acknowledgment of divine care and providences, or whether we meet with those of like precious faith, let us see to it that reverence marks our conduct and our words as well as rules in our hearts. Let us, too, take off our shoes, let us lay aside the ordinary conduct of life by which we are in contact with the world, and in all our ways acknowledge him, especially when we hearken to his voice in the study of his Word as his people.

**"SEEN THEIR AFFLICTION" – "HEARD THEIR CRY"
– "KNOW THEIR SORROWS"**

With these words the Lord informed Moses briefly that he had not been negligent of the interests of Israel. By these words he allows him to understand that not until this time had the appropriate moment come for interference on behalf of Israel. And this thought of the divine knowledge, sympathy and care, and waiting for a due time, would give Moses all the more confidence in the Lord's ability to do according to his own good purposes when his time had come. And so it is with us: If we look back over the 1800 years and more of this Gospel dispensation, and perceive how the Lord's cause has been permitted to be overwhelmed by the forces of evil during the "dark ages" and even yet, we stand amazed, and might be inclined to say, "Does God not know? does God not care? that he allows his own name to be dishonored and his Truth to be trampled under foot and his faithful people to suffer?"

The Lord assures us, too, that he knows all about these **[R3990 : page 142]** matters and is very sympathetic, far more so than we, and he is both able and willing to grant the deliverance needed at the appropriate time. What confidence it gives us now when we look back and behold that Spiritual Israel has been preserved through all these centuries! that notwithstanding the fiery affliction and adversity that burned against them, they have not been consumed! How it comforts and cheers us now to hear the Lord's voice telling us of the deliverance that is just at hand, and sending by us his messages of love and power to all those who have and are to hear, and who are desirous of having liberty from the power of the world, the flesh and the Adversary. O, yes! we occupy holy ground, we hear the holy voice, our eyes are opened to see the wonderful things. The Lord be praised! Let us give heed to his Word.

"THOU MAYEST BRING FORTH MY PEOPLE"

First of all the Lord informed Moses, "I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians," etc.; then he adds, "Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh that thou mayest bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." It is to be noted that God expressly declares himself to be the Deliverer, and had Moses been then disposed to boast of his own powers and doings we presume that the Lord would not have used him, but would have found some one else for the work. Whenever the Lord sends us on any special mission, we may be sure that he does not wish us to undertake it as our own mission, nor to claim the honor of the success attending it. He merely deigns to use us as his instrumentalities, whereas he could do the entire work much easier, we might say, without us. How wonderful it seems that God throughout all his dealings, past and present, has been willing to use his consecrated people. Telling them on the one hand that they are unworthy, he assures them on the other hand of his willingness to use their imperfections and to overrule and guide in respect to their services for him and his cause.

The prime essentials evidently in the faithful performance of such a commission would be reverence for the Lord and humility as respects our own talents and abilities. It was so with Moses, the "meekest man in all the earth." Not stopping even to tell the Lord of his appreciation of the facts that he had been chosen for and had undertaken this great work, Moses was overwhelmed with the thought that the Lord would deign to use him as a messenger, and he promptly disclaimed any special qualifications therefor. Indeed, he evidently felt, as well as said, that there were others much more capable of the work than himself. But was it not this very appreciation of his own unworthiness that helped to make him suitable for the Lord's business? And so with us: we may be sure that when we feel strong then we are weak, and when we feel weak in our own strength then we are best prepared to be

strong in the Lord and in the power of his might and to be used of him as his instruments. It was so with the great Apostle; it must be so, we believe, with all whom the Lord will deign to use and acknowledge in any part of his service.

Overwhelmed with a realization of the responsibilities of the work suggested, Moses protested to the Lord that he had not the qualifications, and the Lord's answer was that this was true, but that his weakness would be perfected in the Lord's strength – "Certainly I will be with thee." And this being true, how could the mission be a failure? It is equally true with us today: if the Lord be for us and with us, who could be against us? How could the work fail? Many of the Lord's people are being called out of Babylon and its confusion and darkness, its oppressions and its bondage, to creeds of the "dark ages," and its social boycotts, etc., to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth, to give their hearts, all that they have, to him and his service.

And all the members of the body of Christ, the antitypical body of Moses, are permitted to have a share, as the Lord's representatives, in this work of declaring the fall of Babylon, the presence of the King, and the gathering together unto him of all who have made a covenant with him by sacrifice. While feeling our unworthiness of so great an honor, and our inability as respects so great a work, let us remember that the Lord himself is with us, and that since it is his work it will go onward and accomplish the designs intended, and gather out eventually all who are truly the Lord's, whether we are faithful or whether we are unfaithful. But let us be faithful, and thus maintain the relationship to the great antitype of Moses, and ultimately be associated with him in the glories of the Kingdom, in the dispensing of the blessings and judgments of the future age. – Acts 3:23.

Not only did the Lord assure Moses of his presence and power and cooperation in the mission, but also that it would result successfully – that he would bring the people out of the land of Egypt and into this very mountain, and to the very place where the Lord was then communing with him. The matter began to take tangible shape before Moses' mind: as God said it would be so, undoubtedly his word would be fulfilled. So the Lord's assurances to us, that the results will come anyway, are an encouragement to us to go forward and to do our parts. The Lord will do the work, and the whole question is whether or not we will have a glorious share in it as his members and representatives.

"I AM THAT I AM" – HE WHO IS – JEHOVAH

Whatever confidence Moses had in his brethren, and their readiness to believe the promises of God and to accept deliverance from Egypt, he seems to have lost. Even while God was telling him of the success of the mission upon which he was being sent, Moses' mind was reverting to the attempt he had made forty years before, and so he objects: "Lord, when I come unto the children of Israel and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers sent me unto you; and they shall say unto me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?" The people of Israel, long in association with the Egyptians, had doubtless lost much of their faith in the one God of their fathers. Their heathen neighbors and masters of the Egyptian nation recognized various gods, and seemed to be greatly prospered, and it is altogether probable that the Israelites had by this time come to wonder which god they should count as theirs and what his name might be. Moses' question seems to imply that his thoughts ran in this channel. God's reply was the giving of his name, Jehovah, for the words, "I am that I am," signify the same as the name Jehovah – the self-existent one, the one who always exists.

Perceiving that the question only covered a part of **[R3991 : page 143]** Moses' meaning, the Lord proceeded to prove to his servant that this name would not be an empty sound in his mouth, but that he would be with him and exercise powers which would exemplify his greatness, his dignity, his ability to deliver the people. Taking advantage of the common things, the Lord referred to the shepherd's staff which Moses carried and bade him throw it to the ground; it at once became a serpent. Moses' faith was again tested, and the Lord bade him take it up again, and it became a staff in his hand as at first. The assurance that he would be able to give the people this demonstration and other demonstrations that God had sent him to them strengthened Moses' confidence in God and made up for his lack of confidence in himself. And this should be the case with all of us; we are not to have confidence in ourselves, but if we go forth strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, confident and rejoicing because he is with us, we are not only safe as respects ourselves but in the proper condition for the Lord to more and more use us in his service – "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted; he that exalteth himself shall be abased," is the divine method of procedure.

Moses urged further that he could find some one much more capable of telling the good tidings than himself. He said, "I am slow of speech," I never was an orator that could answer, reason out, this matter with Pharaoh. I should feel so abashed upon coming into his presence, and so feel my insignificance, that even though I were your representative I fear that I would not be able to present your message in a proper manner. Meeting this objection, the Lord told Moses that he would give him his brother Aaron as a mouthpiece. Thus strengthened and encouraged, the meekest man in all the earth set out upon his mission to meet the greatest king of earth at that time, Pharaoh Menephtah.

Let each of us then, dear readers, impress upon our hearts the essence of this lesson, that if God be with us and for us, however humble and weak of ourselves, we may be mighty through him to the pulling down of the strongholds of error and for the building up of his people in the most holy faith, and for their deliverance from the bondage of error. Let us in the name of the Lord do with our might what our hands find to do, but always with the thought that we serve the Lord. Let his words, "Certainly I will be with thee," be the strength in our every endeavor in his name and cause.
