

Exposition

Each issue of THEMELIOS is to contain an expository study. The Rev. Alan M. Stibbs served in China and since 1937 has been Vice-Principal of Oak Hill College, London, an Anglican Theological College. Author of many works, his trilogy *Understanding God's Word*, *Obedying God's Word* and *Expounding God's Word*, have been widely appreciated. The exposition is based on Exodus 2.11 - 3.12, Acts 7.17-35, Hebrews 11.23-26, and should be read with reference to these passages.

The

Call

of

MOSES

Moses was unquestionably a man for whom God had a special purpose and a great task. Let us seek to appreciate how he was prepared for it, and led into it. For the Bible records show us both how much God did in His sovereign providence, and how much Moses had both to do and to endure in personal experience, before he was ready fully to enter into his life-work.

(i) *By God's overruling providence.* This was the primary source and cause of Moses' vocation, - God's pleasure

by A. M. Stibbs

and purpose, and God's power to fulfil His own will. Let us notice (a) *the providence of God in his birth*. At first sight it would appear that the time of his birth was a bad time to be born. It was for his people, the Israelites, a time of unfavourable political change, a time of increased trouble and affliction, a time of threatened national extinction. (Exodus 1.7-11, 22). But the Bible records put his birth into a larger context, and give us a true perspective. On the one hand, *the home of his birth* was a home where there was faith not fear, hope not despair. His parents trusted in divine preservation. (Hebrews 11.23). On the other hand, *the time of his birth* is dated in God's calendar as the time for the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham (Acts 7.17-20).

Let us notice (b) *the providence of God in his preservation and education*. (Acts 7.21, 22). The faith of Moses' parents was not disappointed. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. God can make even the enemies of His people serve His ends. So Moses was rescued and cared for by Pharaoh's daughter. Moses was given in Egypt, as he grew up, the status of a royal prince, with all its privileges. While the rest of his fellow-Hebrews were suffering hardship and oppression, Moses was enjoying every social advantage and the benefit of the best education of his day. He became a man capable and proficient, in both speech and practice, in expression and execution; a man trained for leadership. Why? Moses needed all this equipment in order to become what God intended him to be, the leader and lawgiver of Israel. God was preparing His

own workman. Let us learn, too, that God can still purpose that some should enjoy first class education; for His work still needs some men of the highest training and the best equipment.

(ii) *By his own responsive choice*. The second decisive factor in Moses' entrance into his high calling was his own responsive choice. For he was an Israelite. The Israelites were suffering oppression at the hands of the very world which was giving him wealth, comfort and privilege. Was he prepared to incur Pharaoh's wrath by openly siding with the hated Hebrews? The Bible tells us how Moses fully faced what such a choice would involve, and then made his decision, - 'by faith'. It was his awareness of the unseen God that made him see things differently, and choose as he did. Let us consider the choices he made (Hebrews 11.24-26).

(a) *He refused to be called an Egyptian prince, choosing rather to be reckoned as one of the people of God*. By natural reckoning he was a man of culture, a royal prince; the Hebrews were a despicable horde of illiterate slaves. But 'by faith' Moses saw them as 'the people of God', and therefore the people of destiny, for whom God had His purpose which would endure long after Egypt had had its day. So he deliberately made his sacrifice, and threw in his lot with them.

(b) *He chose rather to suffer affliction than to enjoy the pleasures of sin*. To human sight life as a prince in Egypt was a thousand times more attractive, pleasant instead of painful, secure and comfortable instead of uncertain and hard, affording, too, intercourse

with cultured society. But 'by faith' he now saw such enjoyment of Egypt's attractions as 'sin', as 'missing the mark' of God's intended goal for his life, and as 'apostasy', as a disowning not only of the Hebrews as his brethren, but also of their God as his God.

(c) *He accounted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*. These were the two things he could hope to get from the world, either treasure or reproach. He faced the plain truth that accepting God's call to His service in this world involves taking sides with One whom the world rejects and despises. Moses made his choice; not according to ordinary human reckoning, but 'by faith', by an awareness of the unseen and of the future. 'For he had respect unto the recompense of the reward'. He saw that Egypt's pleasures and treasures were only temporary, whereas association with God's people, and sharing the reproach of God's Christ, would bring an abiding reward.

God in His providence still brings men and women to a similar place of choice, the place in life's journey where a decision must be made which will settle their whole future course, both the work which they do, and the people with and for whom they do it.

Once Moses was in this way prepared to enter upon his lifework, it would be easy to imagine that forthwith his work could begin. But Moses was still not yet fully ready to be used in God's service. There were indispensable lessons to be learnt first. To teach him these a new providence of God put him for a prolonged period in an unexpected

school of discipline. Only when this further course of training had been accomplished was he divinely commissioned to begin his public work. Let us consider these additional preparatory stages, and their significance in relation to their divinely-intended consummation.

(i) *Lessons Moses had still to learn*. From the record of his daring aggressive action on behalf of an oppressed Israelite (Exodus 2.11, 12), we are given decisive practical evidence that Moses' desire and motive were set in the right direction. He was now out to side with the Hebrews against the Egyptians, to relieve their suffering, to secure for them just treatment. But his method and his mind were completely mistaken. He interfered impetuously and in a high-handed manner to put wrong things right, in a way which even his fellow-Hebrews feared and resented. 'He supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not' (Acts 7.23-29). In addition, by such action he inevitably provoked Pharaoh's wrath, and had to flee from Egypt in the interests of his own safety. Clearly he needed to learn patience and submission. He needed to learn to wait the Lord's time, and to act in the Lord's way. This necessary spirit of dependent submission, willing to be controlled, waiting to be directed, is described in the Bible by the word 'meek' (Psalm 25.9). This is exactly what Moses was not; but what in the school of divine discipline he was to become (Numbers 12.3; compare Matthew 11.29).

(ii) *His providentially-ordered place of training*. As a fugitive, forced to go

where he would not naturally have chosen to go, Moses found himself, under God's providence, in a world, and in circumstances and company, completely different from his previous experience. He had been a virtual prince in the centre of a world of culture and wealth, free to satisfy his own pleasure, used to ordering servants to do his bidding. Now he became not only a shepherd in the wide expanses of the empty countryside, but also an underling in the household of a local autocrat, in relation to whom, if he were to commend himself as a newcomer, he needed to be particularly deferential.

Was this experience just a misfortune, and inevitable blank period just to be endured? No; it was a divinely-intended school of personal discipline. Here Moses learnt lessons, which can be learnt only in the place of limitation and loneliness, and in the position of subordination and subservience. Here he learnt, not in theory but through hard experience, the right attitude of spirit towards people and circumstances. He learnt to be in subjection, to take orders, to do things the way the old man expected rather than in the 'much better way' of his own, which he would have preferred. So, says the meaningful scriptural record, 'Moses was content to dwell with the man'. Also, amid the new difficulties and dangers of the desert Moses learnt to care for a flock of wandering sheep, and to notice when any were missing. This taught him patience and watchfulness and self-sacrifice. This prepared him to be the pastor in the desert of God's redeemed but still wayward people. Most of all,

in the desert he was so often alone – but for God. This taught him to practise awareness, communion, dependence. He learnt to endure 'as seeing Him who is invisible' (Hebrews 11.27).

(iii) *The wonder of his ultimate divine calling.* Here in the desert, apparently alone, humanly forgotten, he was suddenly brought into the larger context of his intended calling and service. Here we are suddenly made aware of almighty God, of Egypt, the great world power of the day, of the Hebrews, the people of God's choice, covenant and purpose. (Exodus 2.23-25). We are made aware that this God is about to move in history to deliver His people from the Egyptians. Then suddenly into the midst of this picture and this prospect there is ushered a solitary man keeping sheep, a man overawed by the manifestation of God's presence, and still more by the disclosure that he is to be taken up into the sweep of God's redeeming activity. For the same God who said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people'; and 'I am come down to deliver them'; said personally to this Moses, 'I will send thee . . . that thou mayest bring forth my people. (Exodus 3.1-12).

This is what true divine vocation means, being called to become a fellow-worker with God in the fulfilment of His purposes for the redemption of man. It is something subduing and incredibly wonderful, thus to stand alone confronted by God and His purpose, men and their need, enemies and their power, oneself and one's insignificance, and to hear God say, 'I will send thee . . . Certainly I will be with thee'.