

"THE BIRTH AND PRESERVATION OF MOSES"

I. Introduction

- A. Some of the most powerful images in all of Scripture are those that depict the protection that the Lord extends over his people.
- B. We find many images of this nature in the book of Psalms:
 - 1. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." (Ps. 23:1)
 - 2. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." (Ps. 46:1)
 - 3. "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." (Ps. 91:1)
- C. In our study of Exodus 1 last week, we saw how God preserved the people of Israel during their four hundred year sojourn in Egypt.
- D. In the passage that we are studying today, we see how God extended the same providential care over one individual.
- E. These verses show us how God preserved Moses, the man who would be his instrument to deliver his people from their state of bondage.

II. Moses' Ark

- A. Our passage begins by telling us about the ancestry of Moses' parents, who are identified in chapter 6 by their names Amram and Jochebed. (Ex. 6:20)
 - 1. Verse 1 tells us that both Amram and Jochebed were from the tribe of Levi.
 - 2. This may seem like a minor detail to us, but it actually had great significance to the original readers of this book.

3. It conveys that Moses was from the tribe that God would later designate as the one that was set apart to provide spiritual leadership in Israel.
 4. It establishes Moses' credentials as covenant mediator in that particular stage in redemptive history.
- B. Verse 2 tells us that when Jochebed conceived and bore a son, "she saw that he was a fine child."
1. That is the way it is worded in the ESV.
 2. Most of the other English translations have something similar to this, such as "he was a goodly child" or "he was beautiful."
 3. This suggests that the reason why Jochebed was so intent on preserving her son's life was because he was such a fine-looking baby.
 4. That may have been the case, but this way of translating the phrase causes us to miss out on something.
 5. The Hebrew text literally says, "she saw that he was good."
 6. Does that remind you of anything?
 7. It certainly would have reminded Moses' original readers of something.
 8. It echoes the refrain that is repeated throughout Genesis 1: "And God saw that it was good."
- C. This connection with the creation account is significant.
1. It points to how Moses will be the instrument through which God will bring about a new creation by delivering Israel out of their bondage in Egypt.
 2. This is what salvation is.

3. It is God's work of new creation, as he takes those who were dead in sin and makes them alive in Christ.
 4. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."
 5. If you are a Christian, you are a new creature in Jesus Christ.
 6. You have been set free from slavery to sin so that you might belong to God and serve him.
- D. Our text tells us that when Moses got too big to hide any longer, his mother placed him in a basket and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile river.
1. If you have ever read this passage in the King James Version, you may recall that it translates the term "basket" as "ark".
 2. The reason why it does so is because this is the same Hebrew word that is used to refer to Noah's ark in the book of Genesis.
 3. In fact, these are the only places in the entire Old Testament where this particular word is used.
 4. The connection between this passage and the story of Noah is made even more clear by several other details.
 5. Both Noah's ark and Moses' basket were coated with pitch.
 6. Both Noah and Moses were preserved from the waters of destruction in their respective arks.
 7. And both were used of God to begin a new era in the outworking of his plan of redemption.
 8. As Douglas Stuart notes in his commentary on this passage: "it is hard to imagine that Moses was not keenly aware of

the obvious comparison between himself and Noah. They were both deliverers / rescuers who were called by God to lead people and animals through and out of danger into a new location where those people and animals would become dominant in establishing a new stage of God's unfolding plan of redemption of the world." [88]

- E. What are we to make of the fact that Moses' mother would take such a desperate action?
1. This is the Nile river we are talking about, a river that has crocodiles in it, the very river into which Pharaoh ordered Hebrew baby boys to be thrown.
 2. Wasn't Jochebed abandoning her child to certain death?
 3. I don't think so.
 4. For one thing, she hid the ark among the reeds in the shallow water, trying to keep it from being discovered by anyone who might do harm to her child.
 5. She also had her daughter Miriam, who was probably between the ages of 6 and 12, keep watch over the child.
 6. And the fact that Pharaoh's daughter went to bath in this particular spot tells us that this was not a popular hang-out for large reptiles.
 7. Jochebed was doing what she could to preserve her son's life.
 8. At three months of age, it would be impossible to keep him hidden any longer.
 9. His cries would be too loud.
 10. In all likelihood, her intention was only to hide Moses during the daytime, when the Egyptian patrols went through the Hebrew settlements in search of male babies.

11. She hoped that the sound of the reeds swaying in the breeze, paired with the sound of the river itself, would mask the child's cries.
- F. Another factor that we need to take into account in interpreting this text is that Hebrews 11 tells us that Moses' parents were acting in faith when they hid their child.
1. It says, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict." (v. 23)
 2. Their actions were the fruit of their faith.
 3. This does not mean that their actions were free from sin.
 4. Their works were imperfect, as are all of the good works that we do as believers.
 5. But Moses' parents were trusting in the Lord to be faithful to his word.
 6. They believed that God would preserve his people and bring them into the inheritance that he had promised them.

III. Moses' Deliverance

- A. In the next part of our passage we see that their faith was not in vain.
1. The Lord did not let the child die, but provided a way for his deliverance.
 2. And he did so in a manner that would prefigure the large-scale deliverance that he would bring about through this child many years later.

3. Moses was drawn out of the water, he was well cared for, and he was brought into the house of the king.
 4. This is a picture of what God would eventually do for Israel as a whole.
 5. He drew them out of the waters of the Red Sea, he provided for them in the wilderness, and he brought them into a land where he would dwell in their midst as their King.
- B. The great irony in this passage is that the Lord brings about Moses' deliverance through the unlikeliest of agents: Pharaoh's own daughter.
1. This girl comes down to the river to bathe, accompanied by her attendants.
 2. And as she bathes, she sees the ark hidden among the reeds.
 3. Though the text does not explicitly tell us this, she was probably drawn to it because she heard the child crying.
 4. After sending her servant to fetch the ark, she opens it up and sees the child crying.
 5. The text then tells us that "She took pity on him and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.'"
- C. Now, stop and consider this for a moment.
1. This young lady's father was not a compassionate man.
 2. He issued a decree ordering that babies be thrown into the Nile river.
 3. But instead of obeying her father's command and drowning the child, Pharaoh's daughter took pity on him.
 4. This was God's doing.

5. He caused a girl from a savage and selfish family to have a tender and compassionate heart.
 6. As a result, the house that decreed Moses' death ended up being the house that preserved his life.
- D. It is also worth noting that Moses was probably not the only Hebrew boy who was kept from being drowned in the Nile.
1. In chapter 12 we learn that there were six hundred thousand Israelite males at the time of the exodus. (v. 37)
 2. It is unlikely that the number would have been anywhere near that high if Pharaoh's decree had been carried out with much success.
 3. Just as we saw in chapter 1, the Lord kept on frustrating Pharaoh's attempts to wipe out the covenant people.

IV. Moses' Nurture

- A. After describing Moses' deliverance, our text then tells us how the Lord provided for Moses' nurture.
1. When his sister Miriam saw that Pharaoh's daughter had discovered the ark among the reeds, she approached her and asked, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?"
 2. Because Miriam made this offer, Moses' own mother was able to nurse him.
 3. This meant that Moses would continue to live with his family until he was weaned.
 4. In the ancient world, children were not weaned until the age of 3 or 4.
 5. This ensured that Moses would be taught about the God of Israel.

6. This tells us something about the importance of making the most of the opportunity that we are given to train up our children in the faith from their earliest years.
 7. Moses' parents only had three or four years to make sure that he was well-grounded in the faith, but they made the most of it.
- B. We should also note the irony of this situation.
1. Moses' mother was paid by the household of Pharaoh to nurse her own child.
 2. This further emphasizes the futility of Pharaoh's attempt to oppress and destroy the people of God.
 3. In spite of all of the ways that Pharaoh works against the covenant people, God takes his efforts and causes them to work for his people's good.
- C. Jochebed must have rejoiced over how her son had been delivered from Pharaoh's edict.
1. Moses was now under royal protection.
 2. As one commentator surmises, "We can well imagine Moses' mother carrying the baby out and about and being met in the street with, 'That's a lovely little girl you have there... (because, of course, sons would not be out in public view) and being able to reply, 'Oh, no, this is my son, Moses.' Well then, hadn't you better keep him hidden?' would have been the obvious response. 'Certainly not!' she could say with confidence, 'He's the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. They can't touch him.'" [Motyer, 36]
 3. As wonderful as this was, there was a bittersweet edge to it.
 4. Moses was now the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter.

5. When the time came for him to be weaned, he would have to leave his family and live in Pharaoh's palace.
6. Jochebed was spared from having to see her son die, but she had to give him up when he was only four years old.
7. This reminds us that the outworking of God's saving purposes in our lives sometimes involves things that are difficult for us to bear, even things that are heartbreaking.

D. While Moses would be raised by Pharaoh's daughter after his weaning, the Lord ensured that he would never forget his true identity.

1. Pharaoh's daughter called the child "Moses," a name that has the same consonants as the Hebrew verb that means "to draw out."
2. She chose this name because that is how she ended up with him: she drew him out of the Nile.
3. But in God's providence, this name would be a means of reminding Moses where he came from.
4. He would always know that he was one of the Hebrew babies that Pharaoh ordered to be cast into the Nile.
5. Every time he heard his name, he would be reminded of his Israelite identity.

V. Conclusion

- A. This is a passage that helps us keep things in proper perspective.
1. When we look at the world today, we see many things that pose a threat to us as God's people.
 2. We are often anxious about these things.

3. We are afraid that harm might befall Christ's church and that the advance of the gospel might be hindered.
- B. This passage teaches us that we should never be worried about such things.
1. Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the world.
 2. He was intent on destroying the covenant people.
 3. But God used Pharaoh's own house to preserve and nurture the man through whom he would bring about his people's deliverance.
 4. When the living God looks down upon this world and sees all of the things that threaten his church, he is never worried.
 5. He will not allow even one hair on our heads to be harmed unless it serves to advance his good purposes for us.