

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

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THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING TO

MOSES

ANTHONY T. SELVAGGIO

“Anthony Selvaggio draws us into the story of Moses in a most personal way. In concise and stirring chapters, he shows us the beauties of the Lord Jesus and teaches us practical lessons about godliness.”

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“Anthony Selvaggio provides a welcome survey of and pathway into the exodus that points us to Christ, to the redemption he accomplished for us, and to his ongoing work in us.”

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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
THE OLD TESTAMENT

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of Old Testament characters, written for
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and preaching of the Old Testament*

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ANTHONY T. SELVAGGIO



P U B L I S H I N G

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To my daughter, Katie,
through whom I have learned so much
about God's providence and love

and

To the Rev. Dr. James D. Carson,
whose deep love for Jesus Christ and his church
continues to inspire and challenge me

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FOREWORD

*The New Testament is in the Old concealed;
the Old Testament is in the New revealed.*

—Augustine

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. (1 Peter 1:10–12 esv)

“Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them

FOREWORD

in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.
(Luke 24:22–27 *esv*)

The prophets searched. Angels longed to see. And the disciples didn't understand. But Moses, the Prophets, and all the Old Testament Scriptures had spoken about it—that Jesus would come, suffer, and then be glorified. God began to tell a story in the Old Testament, the ending of which the audience eagerly anticipated. But the Old Testament audience was left hanging. The plot was laid out, but the climax was delayed. The unfinished story begged for an ending. In Christ, God has provided the climax to the Old Testament story. Jesus did not arrive unannounced; his coming was declared *in advance* in the Old Testament—not just in explicit prophecies of the Messiah, but also by means of the stories of all the events, characters, and circumstances in the Old Testament. God was telling a larger, overarching, unified story. From the account of creation in Genesis to the final stories of the return from exile, God progressively unfolded his plan of salvation. And the Old Testament account of that plan always pointed in some way to Christ.

AIMS OF THIS SERIES

The Gospel According to the Old Testament series was begun by my former professors, Tremper Longman and Al Groves, to whom I owe an enormous personal debt of gratitude. I learned from them a great deal about how to recognize the gospel in the Old Testament. I share their deep conviction that the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is a unified revelation of God and that its thematic unity is found in Christ. This series of studies will continue to pursue their initial aims:

- to lay out the pervasiveness of the revelation of Christ in the Old Testament

- to promote a Christ-centered reading of the Old Testament
- to encourage Christ-centered preaching and teaching from the Old Testament

These volumes are written primarily for pastors and laypeople, not scholars. They are designed in the first instance to serve the church, not the academy.

My hope and prayer remain the same as Tremper and Al's: that this series will continue to encourage the revival of interest in the Old Testament as a book that constantly points forward to Jesus Christ, to his sufferings and the glories that would follow.

IAIN M. DUGUID

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One of the great joys of writing a book is the creative aspects of the endeavor. Engaging in creative labors is a way, analogically, to explore what it means to be created in the image of God. God is the Creator of all things, and he made us to be “creators” of sorts. Of course, there is a massive distinction between God’s creative work and our own. First, God created all things out of nothing, and we create only in a subsidiary manner with preexisting matter. Second, God created without the aid of human beings, whereas our creative endeavors are nearly always dependent on a community of persons. This is certainly true in my own experience and in the case of this book. Accordingly, I wish to acknowledge the contributions of others in this creative work.

First, I want to thank Iain Duguid, the editor of this series and the one who reached out to me with the opportunity to contribute to it. I first met Iain when I was pastoring in western Pennsylvania. I entreated him to come to my church and teach our people. He came and opened the truth of the gospel in the Old Testament in powerful and memorable ways. I can’t remember most of my own sermons, but I recall distinctly Iain’s winsome and deep presentations. I also profited greatly from one of Iain’s contributions to this series. I relied heavily on his volume dealing with the life of Abraham when I was teaching through Genesis. In that volume, Iain marvelously wove together a Christ-centered interpretation of Abraham while simultaneously doing justice to the ethical implications of Abraham’s life and actions within the historical milieu in which he lived. I have found

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

similar richness in every other volume penned by Iain, and I am pleased to acknowledge that he has made me a more effective communicator of the Old Testament. But I also wish to give my thanks to Iain for his assistance in editing this manuscript. He provided me with challenging and encouraging comments that vastly improved this creative effort.

Second, I wish to give thanks to others who contributed to this work. I am grateful to all those who reviewed the manuscript and offered endorsements of it. These men have all been very generous with their limited time. I want to particularly thank Dennis Johnson, of Westminster Theological Seminary in California, for his in-depth reading of the manuscript and his helpful comments, which I relied on to improve this book. I also wish to thank the good folks at P&R Publishing for granting me the opportunity to partner with them once again. They do yeoman work in continuing a legacy of producing solid Christian books in the Reformed tradition. Particularly noteworthy are the contributions of John J. Hughes and Rick Matt, each of whom polished this work in significant ways.

Third, I want to give thanks to the people to whom I have preached, pastored, and taught over the years. They have all contributed to this work through their friendships, sufferings, and joys. We are shaped in many ways by those who surround us, and that is certainly true in my case. Of course, the most profound of these personal human relationships is my relationship with my wife, Michelle, and my children, Katie and James. They have shaped me, humbled me, and helped me in this endeavor in innumerable ways.

Finally, I wish to give thanks to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He has empowered me to create and provided me with the privilege of being a vessel in his service. Although life has taken me on interesting and varied paths, the greatest vocational pleasure that I continue to experience is being used as a bullhorn to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. It is my hope that this book will also be used to communicate that inextinguishable, immutable, glorious truth.

INTRODUCTION

A Faithful Servant in God's House

In the United States we refer to the three major automobile producers, General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler, as the “Big Three.” When it comes to Old Testament studies, we can also argue that there is a “Big Three.” The “Big Three” figures of the Old Testament are Abraham, David, and, the focus of this book, Moses.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Moses to the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation. Arguably, Moses is the most significant Old Testament figure because of his unique role as mediator of the old covenant. Abraham and David were significant covenant figures, but, in old covenant terms, only Moses could claim the role as God’s mediator. In this sense, Moses is the only parallel to Jesus Christ, who is the mediator of a new and better covenant. The great Reformed biblical theologian Geerhardus Vos, in acknowledgment of Moses’ vital and unique role in God’s plan, stated that Moses “may be fitly called the redeemer of the Old Testament.”¹ This book will explore the life of this unparalleled Old Testament figure and how God used him to reveal and foreshadow the work of Jesus Christ.

The heart of Moses’ story is contained in the book of Exodus. Yes, his story extends to Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, but the heart of his mediatorial and prophetic work, as well as his personal biography, is to be found within the pages of the book of Exodus. Accordingly, it will be helpful to have some sense of the structure

and purpose of Exodus and its influence on the entirety of God's written revelation.

EXODUS: THE BOOK

Exodus is both a book and an event. As a book, Exodus is situated among the first five books of the Old Testament, referred to cumulatively as the Pentateuch. This means that Exodus is intimately connected to the book of Genesis, which immediately precedes it. In fact, Exodus should be seen as a continuation of the Genesis story, much like the book of Acts should be viewed as a continuation of the Gospel accounts in the New Testament. Although a significant amount of time has elapsed between the end of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus, Exodus essentially tells the story of the fulfillment of parts of the Abrahamic covenant. When God shared his covenant with Abraham, he informed Abraham of the bondage his descendants would face in Egypt and how God would liberate them from this bondage (Gen. 12:1–3, 5, 17). The book of Exodus details this bondage and demonstrates God's faithfulness in liberating his people and fulfilling his covenant promises to Abraham.

The structure of the book of Exodus is relatively simple. It can be divided into three parts. First, there is the story of Israel's bondage in Egypt and its subsequent deliverance by the power of God mediated through his servant Moses (Ex. 1:1–13:16). In this first part of the book we learn a great deal about Moses' own life and personal transformation. We see God working in the heart of Moses to make him a worthy servant and preparing him for his role as mediator. The second part of the book of Exodus deals with the wilderness wanderings of God's people as they migrate to the land of promise (Ex. 13:17–18:27). During this time we learn a great deal about the nature of human sin and the sufficiency of God. Finally, in the third part of Exodus, we

zoom in on Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:1–40:38). During this final part of Exodus two major events occur—the giving of the law (the Ten Commandments) and the establishment of the Tabernacle.

Though the entirety of this book is monumental in its importance to the rest of redemptive history, the actual exodus event is what casts the greatest shadow upon the rest of God’s redemptive revelation.

EXODUS: THE EVENT

God’s delivering of his people from bondage in Egypt is the most significant redemptive event of the Old Testament. The exodus creates a paradigm, a type, of the redemptive work of God, and it reveals the basic status of humanity. Due to the fall, humanity is in bondage to sin, much like the Israelites were in bondage to the Egyptians. We are, apart from Christ, in slavery to sin whether we are aware of it or not. The only way to move from bondage to liberation is for God to intervene. God did that in the exodus by using a human mediator—Moses. In the New Testament, of course, we learn that God orchestrates the ultimate deliverance from bondage to sin through the mediatorial work of his son—Jesus Christ. Jesus secured the exodus of his people who were formerly captives to sin. He did this through the cross.

But the exodus event was not only significant in foreshadowing Christ’s work on the cross and the liberation of his people from sin; it also served as a paradigm of hope for the Old Testament saints who were struggling during the time of the Babylonian captivity. This connection is particularly stressed in the prophecies of the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 35:5–10; 40:3–5; 43:14–20; see also Hos. 2:14–16).

The exodus event serves as the most powerful type showing forth the pattern of God’s redemption. It is woven through the entire tapestry of Scripture and is

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especially evident in the very life and work of Jesus Christ. Just consider the first four chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, which recount the early life of Jesus and the beginning of his public ministry. Jesus, like Israel, must go down to Egypt for a period of time to escape the death threats of a tyrannical dictator seeking to kill the sons of Israel (Matt. 2:13–15). In Matthew 2:15, we learn that Jesus’ journey to Egypt and his return therefrom are in fulfillment of the prophecy of Hosea 11:1, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.” The next major event recorded by Matthew after Jesus’ return from Egypt is his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (Matt. 3:13–17). This parallels the journey of Israel through the waters of the Red Sea after the exodus from Egypt. Later, like Israel, Jesus enters the wilderness to encounter the temptation of Satan, but unlike unfaithful Israel, Jesus overcomes this temptation by standing firmly upon the Word of God (Matt. 4:1–11). Of course, the Scriptures that Jesus uses in his confrontation with Satan all come from the book of Deuteronomy, which deals with the wilderness experience of Israel. After this victory over Satan, Jesus proceeds to give his Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:17), in which he proclaims the ethics and imperatives of the kingdom of God. The parallel here is to Moses’ descent from Mount Sinai with the law of God. The entirety of Christ’s life and work is mirrored in the exodus. The apostle Paul goes so far as to refer to Jesus as “our Pass-over lamb” (1 Cor. 5:7).

FROM SERVANT TO SON: A PROPHET LIKE UNTO MOSES

Clearly, given the significance of the exodus event and its foreshadowing of the work of Jesus Christ, the book of Exodus is not ultimately about Moses, but rather about Jesus. Though the two mediators are inextricably con-

nected, there is no doubt that Jesus eclipses Moses in every regard.

The book of Deuteronomy promised that there would be another like Moses: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him” (Deut. 18:15). The New Testament confirms that this prophet like Moses is Jesus Christ. For instance, note the allusion to the end of Deuteronomy 18:15 (the command to listen to Moses) in Matthew 17:5, which records the words of the Father when Jesus ascended the Mount of Transfiguration: “While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. *Listen to him!*’ ” (Matt. 17:5). Peter also made a connection between the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:5 and Jesus in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost:

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.” (Acts 3:19–23)

Jesus fulfills and surpasses the work of Moses. As John puts it in his Gospel, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

The writer to the Hebrews perhaps makes the clearest exposition of the similarities and differences between Moses and Jesus. In chapter three of that epistle, the writer properly acknowledges the faithfulness of Moses by stating

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that Moses was “faithful in all God’s house” (Heb. 3:2). Moses deserves credit for his amazing role in redemptive history and his example of faithfulness to God. But the writer goes on to state that Jesus is worthy “of greater honor than Moses” (Heb. 3:3). What is the primary difference between these two mediators in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews? What is it that affords Jesus greater honor than Moses? The writer makes the distinction clear in Hebrews 3:4–6:

For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. “Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house,” bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

The primary difference between Moses and Jesus is that Moses was God’s servant and Jesus is God’s Son. Moses at his best could only participate in and foreshadow redemption, but Jesus actually accomplished it for his people. Jesus, as the God-Man, served as the mediator of the covenant of grace which secured, not the deliverance of an ancient nation from the clutches of a ruthless dictator, but rather the salvation of his people from their own sins and the wrath of a holy God. Exodus may be primarily about Moses, but it will utterly fail in its purposes if the life of Moses and the experiences of ancient Israel do not lead you to see the One who is like unto Moses!

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. The introduction argues that Moses is perhaps the most significant figure of the Old Testament given his unique role as mediator of the old cov-

- enant. Review the following references to Moses in the New Testament and discuss how they reveal Moses' significance in redemptive history: Matthew 17:3-4; John 1:17; Luke 24:44; Acts 3:19-23; Hebrews 11:24-29.
2. Read Genesis 12:1-3, 5, 17 and consider how this text relates to the story of the book of Exodus.
 3. Discuss how the exodus event of the Old Testament foreshadows the person and work of Jesus Christ, particularly in regard to his redemptive work.
 4. Read Hebrews 3:2-6. List the parallels between Jesus and Moses. Also consider how Jesus' ministry surpassed and eclipsed the ministry of Moses.

CHAPTER ONE

THE POWER OF PROVIDENCE

Exodus 1:1–2:10

My wife and I once attended a play entitled *All in the Timing*, by David Ives. The play is made up of six short comedic sketches, one of which is called “The Philadelphia.” In this sketch, one character enters the scene complaining about his day. He declares that everything is going wrong for him. When he explains his predicament to a friend, the friend tells him that he is experiencing these problems because he is in a “Philadelphia.” The friend used the phrase “in a Philadelphia” to describe a day in which everything you try to accomplish is thwarted. That phrase stuck with us, and, while we have nothing against the city of Philadelphia (it is a wonderful place!), my wife and I sometimes employ this phrase to describe one of those days in our lives when it seems like nothing is going our way. We just look at each other and say, “I am in a Philadelphia.”

Have you ever been “in a Philadelphia,” experiencing one of those days in which everything goes wrong? Have you ever wondered where God is on days like that? I know that when I am in a “Philadelphia” I am often tempted to ask, “Where are you, God?” Perhaps you do too.

As we commence our journey into the life of Moses, we learn that at the time of his birth the Israelites were in a “Philadelphia” of sorts (or perhaps it would be better to say they were in an “Egypt”!). Everything had gone wrong for them. The glorious promises made to Abraham seemed to have fallen to the ground. It must have seemed to them that all hope was lost. But God never forgets his promises, his people, or his plan. In his marvelous providence, we know that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Rom. 8:28)—even when we are in a “Philadelphia.” Israel would eventually realize this, but in the opening chapters of Exodus they must have been doubtful about this reality. Just as we often do during difficult times, Israel was likely questioning the power of God’s providence to work all things together for their good. But it was at the moment when all must have seemed lost to Israel that God sent forth his redeemer and thus revealed the glorious power of his providence.

FROM PROMISE TO PERIL

For us to understand properly the mindset of the Israelites prior to Moses’ birth, we must first consider who they were before everything went wrong. It is important to remember that when Israel entered Egypt four hundred years earlier, the people were filled with promise and hope regarding the future. There were two reasons why the Israelites had such great hope when they first entered Egypt.

First, the Israelites were God’s chosen people. They were the descendants of Abraham and thus heirs to the covenant promises made to him in Genesis 12, 15, and 17. As children of Abraham, the Israelites were promised that they would be prosperous (Gen. 17:6), that they would produce a lineage of kings (Gen. 17:6), and that they would inherit the entire land of Canaan. In addition, God promised

that his covenant would be “everlasting”; it would extend for generations (Gen. 17:7).

The second reason they were filled with hope upon entering Egypt was the fact that it was God himself who had told them to go there. God visited Jacob in a night vision and told him to take his family to Egypt (Gen. 46:1–4). At that time, the children of Israel were experiencing a great famine and there was food in Egypt. Further, not only was there food, but God had also placed his servant Joseph there and had raised him to a position of power in Pharaoh’s court. Even more than that, God promised to be with his people while they were in Egypt and he promised to prosper them:

“I am God, the God of your father,” he said. “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph’s own hand will close your eyes. (Gen. 46:3–4)

God promised Israel (as Jacob and his descendants would henceforth be known) that he had nothing to fear about going to Egypt. God promised to be with his people, to prosper them, and to bring them back.

When Israel first arrived in Egypt, they witnessed the fulfillment of God’s promises and became a great nation there (Ex. 1:7). At this point, the Israelites had everything going for them. They had survived the famine and had prospered in Egypt just as God had promised. The Egyptians did not like Israel’s prosperity and made efforts to suppress them, but the Israelites continually rose to the top. Everything was going their way, but that was about to change. Israel was about to enter a “Philadelphia,” and it began with these words: “Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt” (Ex. 1:8).

FROM BAD TO WORSE

When the new Pharaoh came to power everything changed; everything began to go wrong for Israel. The once prosperous and powerful Israelites soon found themselves as lowly slaves. The Egyptians came to dread them (Ex. 1:12) and worked the Israelites ruthlessly (Ex. 1:13); they “made their lives bitter with harsh labor” (Ex. 1:14). The Israelites were now in bondage to a foreign nation.

In addition to facing ruthless treatment and slavery, the Israelites faced another, even more horrifying, threat—the slaughter of their sons. Although the Egyptians had made their lives bitter, the Israelites were still multiplying in number, much to the alarm of Pharaoh, who feared that they would become a military rival. So Pharaoh hatched an evil plan to control the population growth:

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, “When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” (Ex. 1:15–16)

Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill every Israelite baby boy. The Hebrew midwives, however, courageously obstructed Pharaoh’s plan. They remained faithful to God and refused to implement the plan. This frustrated Pharaoh and led him to employ a more direct strategy for the elimination of Hebrew boys. “Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: ‘Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live’ ” (Ex. 1:22).

As you can see, everything was going wrong for Israel. They had come to Egypt filled with confidence and assurance of God’s promises, but soon found themselves in harsh slavery and under the ruthless oversight

of their Egyptian taskmasters. Even worse than that, a Pharaoh who was unfamiliar with Joseph had mustered his entire nation against them. The Nile was about to become the graveyard of Israel's future. Just pause and consider what Israel's mindset must have been at this moment. The people must have felt like they were in a "Philadelphia." The children of promise were now slaves to a foreign king. They must have been asking questions like, "Where are you, God?" and "Why is this happening to us?"

WHERE ARE YOU, GOD?

Although few of us have faced the type of persecution that the Israelites faced in Egypt, we do sometimes find ourselves in difficult and challenging circumstances which lead us to ask the questions, "Where are you, God?" and "Why is this happening to me?" As Christians, we all give verbal assent to the truth of Romans 8:28, that God "in all things works for the good of those who love him," but it is much easier to assent to this truth when things are going our way. When hard providences crash upon the shores of our lives in seemingly relentless waves, the truth of Romans 8:28 is easy to question and doubt. I confess that in the midst of my own personal trials I have had my doubts. How about you? In the midst of your own personal trials have you ever wondered, "What good could possibly come out of this?"

While it can be difficult to trust God in challenging circumstances, it is often when things seem most perilous that he works most powerfully. God often sows the seeds of redemption in the seemingly barren soil of despair. God enjoys confounding the conventional wisdom of our world, and he often does this by snatching victory out of the jaws of defeat. We can see an example of this in how God delivered Israel from their predicament in Egypt.

THE POWER OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

If there had been a twenty-four-hour news network like CNN in the days before Moses' birth, the headlines that would have been flashing across the screen might have been something like this: "Hebrews Continue in Slavery; No End in Sight," "Hebrew Sons to Be Tossed in the Nile," and "God's Promises: Fact or Fiction?" In other words, things were very bleak for the Hebrews and they knew it. But even at this bleak moment, the hand of God's providence was at work planting the seeds of a plan that would eventually blossom into the redemption of his people and the fulfillment of his promises to them.

God's plan required a leader and mediator through whom God would bring about his deliverance. God's purpose required a human vessel and that vessel was Moses. But Moses was about to enter the world at what seemed like the worst possible time; he was born as a Hebrew son at a time when Hebrew sons were doomed to die in the Nile. The plan of God seemed surely destined to fail, but then God intervened in his providence and extracted a glorious victory. From the river of death, God brought life and deliverance.

The power of God's providence can be witnessed in Moses' early life through the amazing way in which he was preserved in the face of Pharaoh's evil edict. Pharaoh had decreed that every Hebrew son must die, but God decreed that he would send a son of the Hebrews to redeem his people. God won. The kings of earth often shake their fists at heaven and declare themselves to be gods, but their decrees and plans have consistently been relegated to the dust heap of history by the power of God's providence. We see this proven once again in Moses' victorious birth.

But the glory of God's providence in the birth of Moses is not seen primarily in the reality that God won, but in how he orchestrated the events that preserved Moses' life in the face of Pharaoh's decree. God plucked the strings

of history like a masterful musician. He saved Israel by his providential control over the actions of three women.

THREE WOMEN AND A BABY

The first woman whom God employed in his providential preservation of Moses' life was Moses' mother. God gave Moses a faithful and courageous mother. The most powerful man in Egypt had decreed that all Hebrew sons must die, but when Moses was born his mother subverted Pharaoh's decree, putting herself at personal risk. After his birth, Moses' mother realized there was something special about this child and she hid him from the authorities for three months (Ex. 2:2).

But, eventually, Moses grew too big to be hidden, and so his mother came up with the following plan:

But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. (Ex. 2:3)

At first glance, this plan did not seem like a very effective one. After all, the most likely outcome of such a plan was that Moses would die from dehydration, malnutrition, or drowning. Moses' mother was seemingly leaving his survival to chance. It may have been the case that Moses' mother was uncertain of his destiny when she placed him in the water, but it also possible that she knew the location where Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe and strategically placed him in the water so that he would be found by her. Either way, the hand of God's providence was at work in preserving the life of Moses. God was watching over the redeemer of his people.

Exodus 2:4 tells us about the second woman involved in preserving Moses' life: "His sister stood at a distance to

see what would happen to him.” As his sister was standing there, she noticed that other people were approaching, among them Pharaoh’s daughter who was coming to the Nile to bathe. Pharaoh’s daughter was to become the third woman God used to preserve Moses’ life.

When Pharaoh’s daughter arrived, she saw Moses and sent her servant to recover him from the water (Ex. 2:5). As soon as Pharaoh’s daughter looked at Moses, she felt “sorry for him,” recognizing that Moses was one of the Hebrew babies (Ex. 2:6). She decided to adopt him. This is when Moses’ sister jumped into the situation and made the following suggestion to Pharaoh’s daughter: “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?” (Ex. 2:7). And whom do you think she fetched to nurse Moses? Of course, she chose Moses’ own biological mother!

THE CHAIN OF PROVIDENCE

Just consider the chain of extraordinary providences that preserved Moses’ life. His mother hid him for three months. When she could no longer hide him she put him in a basket among the reeds of the Nile on the exact day and time, and at the exact location, that Pharaoh’s daughter was coming to bathe. Moses’ sister just happened to be watching all of this and just happened to think of a great plan to suggest a Hebrew wet nurse. On top of all this, Pharaoh’s daughter, in direct rebellion to her father’s decree, felt pity on Moses and adopted him into the most powerful house in Egypt. Moses was supposed to be dead, but instead he grew up in the house of the leader whom, through God’s power, he would one day bring to ruin.

When we behold the chain of providential events that God used to preserve Moses’ life, we learn a bit about God’s *modus operandi*. *Modus operandi* is simply a fancy Latin way of describing how someone likes to operate, a

pattern of acting. God has a redemptive *modus operandi*. One aspect of God's redemptive *modus operandi* shines forth in his preservation of Moses—irony. Simply stated, God loves irony. Just consider the ironies present in the chain of events that led to Moses' preservation.

First, the Nile was a place where Israel's hope was to be extinguished, for the river was to be the place where its sons would die. But God brought forth from that supposed graveyard the life of his son and servant Moses, whom he would eventually employ in the redemption of his people. Second, consider the fact that it was from Pharaoh's house that the edict went forth to kill the sons of the Hebrews, but through God's providence, it was from Pharaoh's own house, by means of his daughter's compassion, that Moses was saved from that very edict. Finally, consider the irony of the weak defeating the strong. Moses comes into the world as a little defenseless baby and is saved by three women. In contrast, Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the world. Yet, these three women and a baby sowed the seeds of Pharaoh's demise.

Through this amazing and ironic chain of providential events, God preserved the life of Moses and set in motion the wheels of his unfolding plan of redemption. Moses was exactly where he needed to be to serve in his role as mediator. He would be raised with the knowledge of his Hebrew identity (because of his mother's presence), while simultaneously being raised in all of the wisdom and knowledge of Egypt. God had indeed worked all things together for good for his people!

THE POWER OF PROVIDENCE IN OUR LIVES

While the events of our lives may seem incredibly trivial in comparison to the major events that have unfolded in God's redemptive plan, this divine pattern of God bringing good things out of bad is replicated in the pattern of our

lives. The truth of Romans 8:28 is, in fact, most relevant and true at those very moments when we are most likely to place its truth in doubt. God always “works all things together for the good of those who love him” (Rom. 8:28). Our problem is that we often do not see or understand his gentle hand of providence while we are in the midst of trouble. Yet, even in our most desperate moments, he is there. He is there working all things together for good for us.

While we always need to exercise care when drawing parallels between the operation of God’s providence in our own personal lives and in God’s grand redemptive plan, I think Scripture clearly teaches that the power of God’s providence is at work in our own lives. This individual aspect of God’s providence is affirmed by the simple comforting words of Matthew 10:30, “And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” God does pay attention to our lives.

The Westminster Larger Catechism echoes this individual aspect of God’s providence in its answer to the question “What are God’s works of providence?”: “God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing *all his creatures*; ordering them, and *all their actions*, to his own glory” (emphasis mine). Moses wasn’t the only person who experienced the power of God’s providence; every believer enjoys this privilege.

What this means for us is that when we are in a “Philadelphia” and everything seems to be breaking bad in our lives, we can be comforted by the knowledge that God is aware of our struggles and, more importantly, will use our trials for our good and his glory. But it is important to remember that while we are in our struggles we may not recognize God’s providence at work. Providence is something that is often understood at the human experiential level only in retrospect. We usually require some distance to gain enough perspective to see the power and glory of God’s providence in our lives.

This need of chronological distance was present in the account of Moses' preservation as well. While we know the end of the story, Moses' mother did not. For example, when she placed him in a basket she had no idea that God would preserve her son, that he would be raised in Pharaoh's house, and that she would be called upon to be his wet nurse. At the existential moment when she placed her son in the basket, she likely thought she would never see him again. Like so many aspects of the Christian life, we are called to exercise faith in regard to God's providence. This is true even when our story does not end well and things do not turn out "right" in the end. Even when we fail to experience a "happy ending," God is still working for our good and displaying his glory. Admittedly, it requires great faith to trust in God when we suffer difficult providences, but we do not exercise that faith in a void. We have a greater assurance of the truth of Romans 8:28 because we have seen how God, through his providence, orchestrated our deliverance from bondage to sin through the One who is greater than Moses.

THE ONE GREATER THAN MOSES

While the account of God's preserving and protecting of Moses does provide us with comfort regarding the power of God's providence in our lives, its most important function is to point us forward to the work of Jesus Christ. Like Moses, Jesus was born at a time when Israel was under the foot of a foreign power. In Moses' time it was the Egyptians and in Jesus' time it was the Romans. Again, as with Moses, Jesus was born when a powerful leader, King Herod, issued a decree to slaughter Israelite male children. Of course, like Moses, Jesus was preserved from this decree by the providence of God and the faithful actions of his parents.

But while there are many comparisons that can be drawn between the life of Moses and that of Jesus, there are also great contrasts to be made. One of the most important contrasts is in regard to the scope of redemption provided by the two mediators. Moses matured to become the mediator of the old covenant and the human vessel through whom God delivered his people out of their bondage to the Egyptians. But, in stark contrast, Jesus was the mediator of a new and more glorious covenant; he personally delivered his people and he delivered and saved them from sin, death, and the wrath of God. Jesus' work of redemption was clearly greater than that of Moses. This is why the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds his congregation, and by implication us, how important it is for us to fix our eyes on Jesus and to recognize that he far surpasses the glory of Moses:

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. (Heb. 3:11-6)

Yes, Moses was a faithful servant in God's house, but Jesus is God's faithful Son. His glory far surpasses Moses' and the glory of the exodus is eclipsed by the glory of God's providence in bringing about our redemption through Jesus.

All of Jesus' glorious redemptive work was part of a plan forged by the Father before the foundation of the world and perfectly orchestrated in time. As Galatians 4:4–5 reminds us, Jesus came into this world according to the exact timing of God's providence: "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." Jesus came into the world according to God's providential plan and God once again worked the glories of his redemptive irony in a manner that confounded the world and reaffirmed the reality of Romans 8:28. He did this by securing our victory at the moment of seeming defeat. Just think about Jesus on the cross. There was the self-proclaimed Son of God hanging from a cross and seemingly subject to the Roman Empire and its decrees. To his disciples this seemed like the bleakest moment in human history—the Savior of the World was crucified at the hands of men. Yet, in the greatest irony of all, it was at that very moment of seeming defeat that the greatest victory in history was won by the power of God. Jesus rose from the dead victorious and in doing so proved to the utmost the reality of these words: "And we know in all things God works for the good of those who love him."

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. It is very challenging to trust God during difficult times. As we saw in this chapter, Israel faced this challenge during their time of bondage in Egypt. Can you think of a time in your life when you had to trust God during a difficult time? How did you cope? What did you learn from this experience?
2. God commenced his plan of delivering Israel from bondage in Egypt at the very time when all hope seemed lost. Can you think of other times in

redemptive history when God delivered his people at a time when all seemed lost? How is this pattern manifested in the work of Jesus?

3. Moses almost perished as a child, but was saved through a chain of providentially orchestrated events. Can you look back on your life and see a similar chain of providence in how God delivered you from a trial?
4. Read Galatians 6:4–5. This text speaks about the providential coming of Jesus Christ in history at the exact time appointed by God. In John’s Gospel, Jesus frequently refers to his “hour” (John 2:4; 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; 12:23; 12:27). How do the “hour” texts of John’s Gospel relate to Galatians 6:4–5 and what do these texts reveal about God’s role in history and redemption?

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