

Forty Years Ahead of God

Exodus 2:11-15; Acts 7:21-29

Introduction

Our study today, has several parallel passages – one in Hebrews, chapter 11, a second in Acts, chapter 7, and the third in Exodus, chapter 2, as we continue our study of that great Old Testament book.

I want to read with you, before we get into our study, the passage in Acts, chapter 7. Look at verses 20 through 29.

It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God; and he was nurtured three months in his father's home.

And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son.

Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.

But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel.

And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian.

And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand.

On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them to peace, saying,

“Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?”

But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him [Moses] away, saying, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us?”

“You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?”

At this remark Moses fled and became an alien in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

Now look at Exodus, chapter 2. I want to read the few verses that are given of this same account. We will start with verse 11 and read through verse 15. Note the similarity of the two passages.

Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren.

So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

He went out the next day, and behold, two Hebrews were fighting with each other; and he said to the offender, “Why are you striking your companion?”

But he said, “Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?”

Then Moses was afraid and said, “Surely the matter has become known.”

When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well.

Now turn back to Acts, chapter 7. If you have ever wondered whether there was a scriptural illustration of getting ahead of God, you are about to study one today.

As we study the life of Moses in this period of his life, it is possible, as this episode that is given to us in three passages of scripture reveals, to serve God and at the same time, to ignore God. It is possible to be interested in doing the will of God, and yet, to be doing it your own way. It is possible, as in this account of Moses, to be far ahead of God. In fact, when you add up the years, you discover that Moses was forty years ahead of God's plan.

God, however, gave us this colossal failure by Moses for our own instruction. I believe, in our fast paced society of today, it is possible to pull our hectic kind of lifestyle into the life of the church and into the life of our own personal ministries. Patience is sadly lacking and as a result, we soon find ourselves ahead of God.

Moses' Early Years in Egypt

Let us begin by discovering what happened to Moses after Pharaoh's daughter took him away, which we studied in our previous discussion.

His home life

We learned, last week, that Moses was given his name, "Mosheh," from Pharaoh's daughter, not from his parents. "Mosheh" was actually an Egyptian pun on a Hebrew word that means, "to draw out". Pharaoh's daughter was saying, "This is my son whom I drew out of the water," so she gave him a new name.

Moses was perhaps, a three or a four-year-old boy when he went to live with Pharaoh's daughter.

His educational experience

The text, in Acts, chapter 7, verse 22, then tells us that,

Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, . . .

I would agree with most, that Moses was being groomed; he was being prepared for nothing less than

the throne of Egypt. He, being the only son of Pharaoh's daughter, was being groomed as the Pharaoh-to-be. As a result, this idiomatic phrase is given that he, "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians."

The Egyptian commoners did not have this opportunity. We have learned, from archaeologists discoveries, of what occurred at that time. They have uncovered the Temple of the Son, which some have referred to as the Oxford of the ancient world. This was the place where Moses was educated.

At this school, Moses' head would have been shaved and he would have worn the gown of the priest. He would have been given instruction in just about every area of study today. He was schooled in mathematics; he was schooled in archaeology; he was schooled in the sciences.

Chemistry was one science in which the Egyptians out-distanced us even to this day; especially in the area of embalming the dead. We have nothing to compare to their process. In the arts, we have nothing today that can even compare to the Egyptian paintings. Their murals have lasted four thousand years and their colors are brighter than any that we have. I am sure Dupont would love to get their hands on the formulas that they used in that time, because you and I have to paint our houses every four years.

Moses was also schooled in law. Even while he was living, the code of Hammurabi was in existence. This was the legal system that he learned so well that I think God used, as Moses would one day, spell out the law for the people of Israel.

Understand, ladies and gentlemen, that Moses is not in a dusty land that is on the back side of some desert. He is in Egypt in the sixteenth dynasty perhaps, which would mean the great pyramids of Giza are standing during his lifetime. The Sphinx, that you have seen in pictures, was standing when Moses was being raised in the bosom of Egypt. It was an impressive place. It was a world conquering land. And Moses was *the* individual, right in the middle of Pharaoh's court, being trained, schooled, educated by the finest in the land.

I cannot help but compare the humble slave shack that Moses traded in for the palace of Egypt. He would leave a place that would have very simple meals, for the gourmet delights prepared by Pharaoh's own chefs. We cannot help but try to imagine what he

left and what he potentially gained. So we find Moses then, in verse 22a, being,

. . . educated in all the learning of the Egyptians . . .

The results

Note the result of this education, in verse 22b,

. . . he was a man of power in words and deeds.

Moses embodied the qualities of human leadership

- In other words, Moses embodied the qualities of human leadership.

If Peter Drucker, or John Naisbitt, or someone from the secular marketing world evaluated Moses, they would say that Moses is the man for the job of delivering the Israelites; he is the one for the position. Moses embodied all that the world would consider great, in terms of leadership.

Extra-biblical records reveal that Moses perhaps, led the Egyptian army against Nubia, or what is today, Ethiopia. He conquered Ethiopia and captured the capital city because, in his education, he was a warring lord. Pharaoh was conquering the known world and Moses was right in the middle of it.

I would imagine that if Moses took stock of his own training, his education, the qualities of his own life, he would have certainly said, "I am prepared. I am ready. The time is *now* to lead the Israelites out of Egypt."

Moses exemplified the criteria for spiritual ministry

- Not only did Moses embody the qualities of human leadership, but he obviously exemplified the criteria for spiritual ministry because he is about to turn his back on everything he had. Why? Because of his love for the people.

Moses, I believe, longed to be the deliverer of his people. When the text says, "he went out to his brethren and looked," it uses the word with the meaning, "with passion or with great emotion". He had passion, he wanted to lead these people out of tragic and severe slavery into freedom.

Moses was someone you would have looked at and said, "Man alive! Sure, you're God's man! What

are you waiting for? You've got a burden. You've got passion. You've got desire. You've got all of the qualifications. You've been educated in leadership. If anyone is capable of leading three or four million people out of Egypt, you're the man."

Moses' Untimely Plan of Deliverance

Moses had everything possible to lead the people, except the counsel of God. He had all of the knowledge of the Egyptians, but he still lacked the wisdom that comes from God. So he hatches a plot.

Before we discuss that, turn back to Exodus. I want to build a case on a premise that is not specifically spelled out in scripture but I think, is consistent with scripture.

Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 27a, says that Moses, *. . . left Egypt, not fearing the . . . king . . .*

You may remember our study of that passage in a previous discussion. However, we read in Exodus, chapter 2, verses 14 and 15, that Moses fled in fear. It sounds like an apparent contradiction.

The scriptures reveal to us that Moses went out to view his brethren. Look at Exodus, chapter 2, verse 11, again.

Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors . . .

Acts, chapter 7, tells us that Moses was approaching forty at this time. Turn back to Acts and look at that verse, verse 23.

But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel.

You could circle the word "visit." This word is used several times in the New Testament. In fact, it is used in Luke, chapter 7, verses 12 through 16, when Jesus Christ sees a funeral procession coming His way. When the coffin is right beside Jesus Christ, the text tells us that Jesus reached over and touched the coffin. The pallbearers stopped their march and Jesus Christ tells the deceased young man to get up. Then, right in the middle of this funeral procession, the boy sits up and starts talking. Imagine being part of that one! The people in amazement say, in verse 16b

. . . God has visited His people! . . .

That is the same word. The meaning is, “God has come to dwell among His people.”

When the text tells us that Moses went out to “visit his brethren,” I believe it is saying that Moses went out to live with them. It was then, without fear of Pharaoh, that he left all of the court and all of the wealth, and he went out to view, and with emotion, to dwell among the slaves; the Israelites. It would not be until later, when he murdered the Egyptian, that he fled in fear. So, I believe, that Moses is, at this point, abandoning Egypt.

Let us go back to Exodus, chapter 2, and take a look.

Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

Two points concerning Moses’ untimely plan of deliverance

Now I want to give two points about Moses’ untimely plan of deliverance.

His actions were prompted by his own timetable

1. The first point is that Moses’ actions were prompted by his own timetable.

Acts, chapter 7, records,

. . . it entered his mind to visit his brethren . . .

Perhaps Moses had taken stock and thought of all of the qualifications that he had. He knew, from what was happening in the court, that the Israelites were under an extermination edict. The male babies were being thrown into the Nile River. They were being persecuted and killed. Perhaps he was so filled with emotion that “it entered his mind” and he thought, “Lord, this is the time. I’m going.”

While he is out among his brethren, Moses notices an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. The taskmasters, according to archaeologists’ renderings, had long rods. They were sticks with just enough flex to create a tremendous sting. They could also cause severe damage and even death. I picture in my imagination, the Hebrew quivering on the ground while the

Egyptian is beating him with a rod. And there is Moses, in his royal robe, in all of his regality, watching, and perhaps, clenching his fists and shuffling his feet.

So Moses decides, “*Now* is the time. Let’s begin the deliverance.”

He looks this way; he looks that way; he looks behind him; he looks everywhere . . . but up. And, at that moment, he lashes out with a stone or a hammer or a sword, we do not know, but he killed the Egyptian.

The first thing that strikes me is that his actions were prompted by his own flesh; his own timetable; his own rationale. And I am sure, Moses could have rationalized, “He was being beaten. Perhaps, he would have been killed. They are slaughtering the Hebrews. It’s time to act.”

His methods were inconsistent with God’s plan

2. I think, and this is the second point, that Moses’ methods were inconsistent with God’s plan.

It is a difficult thing to try to determine the mind of God. In fact, God says, as recorded in Isaiah, chapter 55, verse 8,

. . . My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways . . .

We can come to a conclusion that we are going to act and we look at all of the resources and we see all of the circumstances. Perhaps you are thinking of investing some money and you gather all of the facts together and it all makes sense. The advisors say, “Go for it! Now is the perfect time.”

However, you have done everything but look up.

It is possible for us to concoct our own definition; our own formula for raising our children or for loving our husband or wife, and we never look at the manual; that is, the Bible, and we never look up.

It is possible to rationalize our lives and justify our means and our methods. That is why it is so crucial to compare them to the record of scripture.

I pulled out a book by the author John Naisbitt that I mentioned earlier, entitled *Megatrends*. It was a blockbuster, a best-seller that represents secular thinking in terms of leadership. I looked up the definition of leadership that he gave in the book because I had remembered it striking me as a little

different than what the scriptures would suggest. Let me quote what he says about leadership, “Leadership involves finding a parade and getting in front of it.”

That is really clever. That is the world’s view. If you are really sharp; if you are really on the edge; if you are really watching, you will see a gap opening up and at that moment, in the energy of the flesh, you will manipulate your way in; you will get in front. If you can sense a mood change among a few people; if you can sense that the people need a leader and you are the one, then at the right moment, you step into place. Oh, it sounds so good.

Moses probably figured out the parade was ready. Perhaps he even heard the band striking up, “It’s time! There’s a need! I’m the man! God already told me through my parents that I was the deliverer.”

So Moses stepped out in front. The problem was, the parade was not going to be ready for forty more years. His methods were inconsistent with God’s plan.

I think this is a difficult thing because so often we can evaluate our methodology on the basis of pragmatism – what seems to work. This has crept into the church and into Christian movements. We do things because they *work*.

For Moses, however, what may not seem to work is God’s plan for forty more years. There would be more suffering; more death; more tragedy. Yet, in that forty year period, God was at work.

I think of a man that I talked to a number of years ago, who had just returned from a board meeting of the mission organization ABWE (Association of Baptists for World Evangelism). That organization, along with other mission organizations, were involved behind the iron curtain at that time. They could not publicize it because they would give away people who were serving there under cover; underground.

One man was brought back out of Russia. Regardless of what you and I may have read, there was not religious freedom there at that time, any more than there was forty years before. He had had a meeting with several Christian leaders. In fact, he told the story to the several hundred men on the advisory board of his work in Russia ministering to what is called, the persecuted church. This is not the licensed church, but as they refer to themselves, this is the persecuted church; the underground church. In China, there are supposedly forty million in the persecuted church with scraps of paper for Bibles and leaders

who are sent to Siberia, if they are caught. This man had had a meeting with two thousand young people in the forest the previous December. They met for four hours, until the KGB discovered where they were and came in waving their pipes and their rubber hoses.

What would we suggest to that church? What would we suggest to those believers? What should they do? What methods should they use in propagating the gospel, in building a church, in living out their Christian lives? Should they take up the sword, like Moses? Should they kill? Should they use Egypt’s methods to battle Egypt? Moses did and he was way ahead of schedule.

We have previously discussed a passage on the methodology of the New Testament church. I want to turn your attention to that now. Turn to I Timothy, chapter 2.

Paul, an aged man, is writing this passage from a prison cell. The man in leadership in Rome is none other than, Nero. Nero has a habit that he enjoys. He takes Christians and, after killing them, he impales them on a stake, douses them with oil, and then, has them placed around his gardens and put to flame. While the burning bodies of these Christians encircle his garden, he throws lavish parties. In addition to that, he is regularly persecuting Christians and putting them to death.

So what does the apostle Paul, writing from a prison cell, tell the church to do? Notice verse 1 of I Timothy, chapter 2.

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,

Paul could have stopped there. We could have assumed that he was talking about Nero, his arch enemy. But he says, in verse 2a,

for kings and all who are in authority . . .

The Greek word for “kings” is “basileus,” which means, “emperor”. In other words, the New Testament church is not to adopt the methodology of the world. It is in spiritual warfare and our warfare weapons are spiritual. Paul says the priority is prayer. He says, “Don’t forget to pray for Nero.”

Pray what? Pray that he may be deposed? Pray that he will pass moral legislation? Paul says, in verse 4, to pray because,

[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Pray for *our* Nero. Pray for those in authority over us. Even when it seems that our prayers do not work, what would you tell the Russian believer? “Pray.”

“Does it work?”

“We don’t know. We’re dying, by the hundreds.”

We do not measure methodology by what seems to work, we measure it by what the scriptures teach. Our primary warfare is not a sword, it is a prayer.

Moses had something to learn from the apostle Paul, and God would take him away for forty years and teach him that.

Notice the results of what happens when Moses adopts the methodology of Egypt to liberate the people from slavery. Look at verse 13 of Exodus, chapter 2.

[Moses] went out the next day . . .

Pause there for a moment. What is Moses doing going out the next day? He is going out the next day because he is going to announce himself. He is going to say, “I’m here. I’m the deliverer. I’m God’s man and it’s time for me to lead you out. Let’s begin shaping our plowshares into swords.”

Moses goes out and before he can get his speech together, he sees, according to verse 13,

. . . two Hebrews were fighting with each other . . .

As if the Hebrews did not have enough trouble, they were fighting each other. So Moses says,

. . . “Why are you striking your companion?” . . .

The Hebrew said to him, in verse 14,

. . . “Who made you a prince . . . over us?” . . .

In other words, “What is the source of your authority? Just because you announce yourself, that doesn’t mean anything to us.”

Forty years later, Moses would come back to the people with a rod in his hand and a message that, “I am coming under the authority of Yahweh.”

At that time, they would follow. But they are basically asking him, “What is your source of authority?”

Moses has nothing to say. Why? Because he is there in the energy of the flesh. This is *his* ministry; this is *his* work; this is *his* timetable; this is *his* job.

The results

Two things happen because Moses is following his own flesh:

- Instead of being accepted, he was rejected.
- Instead of becoming a leader, he becomes a fugitive.

Look at verse 15 of Exodus, chapter 2.

When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well.

“Sat down,” is literally related to pitching camp.

Can you see Moses – on his steed racing across the desert? His gowns of royalty are whipping about in the wind as he gallops along for his life. Here is the prince; here is the man; here is the leader running scared. He ends up in a little oasis in the land of Midian and he sits down and pitches camp by a well, disillusioned.

Ladies and gentlemen, may I suggest to you that when we operate in the flesh; when we tell God what we are going to do; when we discover some sliver of what God’s will may be, but define it in our terms, by our own definition, we also can become disillusioned.

Moses had had everything. He had prepared his plan. He had done everything, but seek the face of God. Over the next forty years, which we will study in our next discussion, God will take Moses and turn him from an obnoxious, brash, self-imposing leader, who has his life under his own control, into a man who is under the control of God.

Application – Questions to Consider

By way of application, let me ask you to consider three questions.

Is impatience a characteristic of your decision making?

1. First, is impatience a characteristic of your decision making?

Do you tend to make a decision, whether it is to teach a Sunday school class or invest money or purchase something or whatever, on the basis of *now*. Do you think, “I can’t wait. Now is the time. And everything seems to be right. I’ve looked to the left. I’ve looked to the right. Why wait?”

That is impatience.

Hudson Taylor, the man who opened China to missions a century ago, said that the primary qualification for one who will serve God is threefold, "Patience. Patience. Patience."

I am stepping all over my own toes here.

Are you making some decision that violates the counsel of God?

2. Secondly, are you making some decision that violates the counsel of God?

Let me give an indicator of the impatience. Are you making a decision that is violating the counsel of God right now? No matter how you define it; no matter how you align it; no matter how you rationalize or justify it, is there something in your spirit that is letting you know that God is saying, "You're out of bounds?"

"But God, I want this. I want this job. I want this person. I want this position. I want this place. And sure, I'll pray a perfunctory prayer for Your way, but in a sense, it's my life here and I'm running it."

As a result, you violate God's command.

Moses knew that it was against God's nature to kill. In fact, Moses would one day, with his own pen,

and I think, immersed with conviction, write the words,

You shall not murder. (Exodus 20:13)

What an afternoon that must have been for him.

One of the keys in understanding whether or not you and I are impatient; are ministering by the flesh is that it violates something of God's counsel.

Do you look everywhere but up when planning some project?

3. Thirdly, do you look everywhere but up when planning some project?

In my office, I have a little phrase or motto that often reminds me of one of the greatest delights in life, if not the greatest. It was written by a missionary who said,

Wise is the individual who knows which way God is going and goes with Him.

Moses would need to learn which way God was going. He would need to learn God's plan; God's consistent design. And then he would have great delight, as I trust we would, in going with God; in going God's way.

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