

## Chapter 9

### The Work of Moses Historical— Not Legendary; Divine—not Human; Miraculous—Otherwise Impossible

WE SHALL find no more instructive, striking, or necessary exhibition of the visible hand of God than is furnished in the history of Moses—which is the history of God’s greatest work upon earth, next to the work He accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. To the consideration of this history we may naturally proceed, after the destruction of Sodom—not that the hand of God was invisible between the two points: in the life of Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, there occurred repeated interventions of the miraculous order in so far as that character appertains to direct communication from God by angelic visitation, or vision, or dream. Still, all these instances are covered by the case of Abraham already looked at. They are all of the same character—the normal adjuncts of the process by which the foundations were laid for the more enlarged development of the purpose of God on the earth that came after. But when we come to Moses, we come to an era of divine operation only to be paralleled by the day still future, when, as Jehovah says to Israel by the prophet Micah, “*according to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt, I will shew unto him marvellous things: and the nations shall see and be confounded at all their might.*” It was a day when the foundations of heaven and earth were laid in a political sense in relation to Israel.

The understanding and reception of the facts of the case are essential to the right apprehension of the whole work of God on the earth since. There is no more unfounded impression than the impression so general in our particular day, that the events of the exodus are the legendary exaggerations of natural occurrences. It is impossible for any logical mind to entertain such a view without entangling itself in greater difficulties than those which it may think by such a view to escape. The events of the exodus are so involved in the entire structure of Scripture that it is impossible to set them aside in the way referred to, without also rejecting the prophets and Christ himself: and as such a rejection is impossible in view of the fulfilment of prophecy and the evidence of Christ’s resurrection, it follows that the assumption of a legendary character for the events of the exodus would involve the impossible hypothesis of the divine endorsement of fictions as the truth. It will also appear on a serious study of all the facts that the reception of those events is necessary to any rational theory of the origin and establishment of the Jewish nation on the earth. Furthermore, the nature of the narrative itself is such as to carry conviction of its truthfulness.

The events of the exodus are repeatedly referred to in the Psalms of David. They are constantly recognised as the beginning of the nation’s history—the foundation of the nation’s power. They are by no means referred to in the spirit of patriotic pride. On the contrary, the generation that witnessed them is said to have been “a stubborn and rebellious generation: a generation that set not their hearts aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law, and forgot his works and his wonders

that he had shewed them. Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided the sea and caused them to pass through, and he made the waters to stand as a heap” ([Psalm 78:8–24](#)). Another Psalm says ([106:7–12](#)): “Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt: they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies, but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea. Nevertheless, he saved them for his name’s sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.”

The events thus referred to are in deprecation of Israel’s share in them. They are not pointed to out of compliment, or as at all affording ground for that sense of pride and glory that is natural to all people, and to none more so than to the Jews. On the contrary, David in another Psalm ([44:3](#)) says: “They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but thy right hand and thine arm and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a regard unto them.” There are other Psalms, however, in which these events—the events of the exodus—are referred to in a different way. They are recited in a spirit of exultation and thanksgiving to God.—See [Psalm 105](#), for example; also [Psalm 136](#).

Allusions like these abound through all the prophets, and are to be met with in the New Testament (*e.g.*, [Acts 7:34](#); [13:17](#); [Heb. 11:28, 29](#)). Either the events of the exodus were divine realities, or the apostles and prophets were false. The latter is an impossible supposition: the former, therefore, is established on a foundation that cannot in the least be shaken. The miracles in Egypt were a necessity. They had a logical relation to the result to be accomplished. They were not mere prodigies like the legendary feats of the heathen. They were rationally connected with an object aimed at. Moses at the time, and David long after, recognised and proclaimed this connection. David’s recognition is briefly but pointedly expressed in one of the foregoing quotations: “He saved Israel *for his name’s sake* THAT HE MIGHT MAKE HIS MIGHTY POWER TO BE KNOWN.” Moses repeatedly alludes to the matter in the magnificent addresses delivered to Israel at the end of the forty years’ sojourn in the wilderness, just before their entry into the land of promise. Let an example or two suffice before entering upon a consideration in detail of the mighty work accomplished by his hand: “Your eyes *have seen* all the great acts of the lord which he did: *Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments* which I command you this day” ([Deut. 11:7](#)). “Ask now of the days that are past which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God, speaking out of the midst of the fire *as thou hast heard*, and live? Or hath God essayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, *according to all that the Lord your God DID FOR YOU IN EGYPT before your eyes?* UNTO THEE IT WAS SHOWED THAT THOU MIGHTEST KNOW THAT THE LORD HE IS GOD: there is none else beside him. *Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice* that he might instruct thee, and upon earth he showed thee his great fire ... Know therefore the day and consider it in thine heart that the Lord he is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath: there is none else ... Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes and his commandments” ([Deut. 4:32–40](#)).

In imploring them to observe the commandments that had been delivered to them, Moses directly appeals to the miracles they had seen, which he adjures them to remember: “Take heed to thyself and keep they soul diligently, *lest thou forget the things thine eyes have seen ... specially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb*, when the Lord said unto me, Gather me the people together and I will make them hear my words ... And ye came near and stood under the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with

darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. AND THE LORD SPAKE UNTO YOU OUT OF THE MIDST OF THE FIRE: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude, only ye heard a voice” ([Deut. 4:9–13](#)).

He presses on their notice the fact that he was not addressing those who had knowledge of these things by hearsay, but whose own eyes had actually witnessed them: “I speak not with your children, *which have not known and which have not seen* the chastisement of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched out arm, and his miracles and his acts which he did in the midst of Egypt. And what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses and unto their chariots, how he made the water of the Red Sea to overflow them as they pursued after you ... And what he did unto you in the wilderness ... And what he did unto Dathan and Abiram ... how the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their households and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel. BUT YOUR EYES HAVE SEEN *all the great acts of the Lord which he did*” ([Deut. 11:2–7](#)).

In enjoining upon them to enforce the obligation of the law upon their descendants, he instructs them to refer specifically to the events of the exodus as the ground of their obedience: “When thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, *What mean* the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, *We were Pharaoh’s bondsmen in Egypt*, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household before our eyes. And *he brought us out from thence* that he might bring us in to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes,” etc. ([Deut. 6:20–24](#)).

Thus, in dealing with the events connected with the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, we are dealing with matters having a fundamental and logical relation to the whole subsequent history. It is not a case of myth engrafted upon a commonplace history, as the enemies of the Bible so easily, and so perfectly gratuitously, and so inconsistently with the most elementary facts of the case, suggest. It is a matter incorporate with every national institution, and every national law, and every national tradition for thousands of years past. It is the kernel of the whole Jewish national phenomenon. That phenomenon is unintelligible apart from it. It cannot be separated from Jewish history and the Jewish existence of the present moment. The Jewish law is not a thing that has been changed and amended with successive generations. The legislative idea which belongs to all other national systems is foreign to the Jewish. The Jewish system stands and has stood for ages on the law of Moses delivered at the beginning, concerning which it was enjoined upon Israel: “Thou shalt not add to nor diminish aught there-from.” Consequently, the origin of that law is to be sought for in the circumstances attendant upon the delivery of the law at the beginning—circumstances reflected, as we have seen, in many allusions in the law, and in a sense incorporate in the very structure of the law itself. The idea of these circumstances being an after-thought is precluded by the nature of the case. Such an idea is merely the wild conjecture of a dogmatic hostility, perfectly unjustifiable except on the ground that the admission of these circumstances would be a concession of the whole claim of divinity of origin, which unbelievers feel bound to resist at all hazards.

A glance at the circumstances preceding Israelitish deliverance will show how essential was the divine interposition, in an open, and signal, and irresistible form, for the accomplishment of the ends in view. Their fathers, coming from Canaan at the time of Joseph’s ascendancy, had settled in Egypt some centuries previously, under a divine promise that in course of time, God would bring them out of Egypt and lead them into the land of promise. Mention had been made

to Abraham for this purpose, and a general period specified for the Israelitish sojourn ([Gen. 15:13](#)). To Jacob also the promise had been given ([Gen. 46:3, 4](#)). Joseph referred to it in his last communication with his brethren before he died: “God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land, unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” ([Gen. 50:24](#)). When the time of the promise drew near, the Israelites had become a numerous community, exciting by their prolificness and their prosperity, the jealousy of their Gentile neighbours, as in Russia, Germany, and Austria in the present day. Jealousy, as now, led to persecution. The Egyptians said: “Come on, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it come to pass that when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens” ([Ex. 1:10](#)).

Not only were the Israelites in this afflicted and powerless position, but they were also in a thoroughly untutored and insubordinate state of mind with regard to the God of their fathers. We learn from Jehovah’s testimony by Ezekiel (chap. [20:6–8](#)) that they were idolaters, worshipping the idols of Egypt. Their subsequent behaviour is evidence of their unenlightened state. Before they crossed the Red Sea, they said to Moses, “Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians” ([Ex. 14:12](#)), and during their journey in the wilderness they repeatedly mutinied, and wished they had remained in Egypt ([Ex. 16:2–3; 17:2–4](#)), and on one occasion under the very shadow of Sinai, they set up an idol calf and worshipped it. Finally, they so heinously resisted the divine instructions touching the invasion of Canaan that they were sentenced to remain in the wilderness till the whole adult generation had died out.

Looking, then, at the powerless and barbarous condition of the Israelites—reduced to helpless serfdom under the Egyptians, and having no disposition to enter upon perilous enterprises—we realise how perfectly unfeasible the idea of deliverance from Egypt was, at the time when the fulfilment of the divine promise was due. Even with a sanguine military leader, nothing was to be made of such a situation of things. But there was no leader. Moses, whose providential development is considered in *The Ways of Providence*, had made one experiment at trying to bring his brethren to right views of the situation, but the only result had been to bring about his own exile. He had been absent from the country for forty years. Nobody had heard from him. There was no scheme among them. Even Moses himself, in the pastoral seclusion of the desert of Horeb, had given himself over to the occupations of a quiet individual life. What more unpromising idea was there at that moment than the idea of leading the Israelites, a helpless, unwilling horde of people, out of a powerful country, where they were held down by special rigours of law, as a useful slave race, dangerous to be allowed any liberty? Such an enterprise had every element of impossibility. As a scheme in human hands, there was no object to serve by it, and no means of accomplishing it.

God had promised it, and if it was to be done, extraordinary means were necessary. This reflection is inevitable if we simply have in view the problem of how Israel was to be rescued from the hands of their oppressors, but how incalculably stronger the thought becomes when we realize the object divinely proposed in that deliverance. It was not merely the rescue of an afflicted race from oppression. This was a subordinate item in the programme. The main purpose, as declared by Moses in the language already quoted, *was that Israel might know Yahweh as the only God, and that the divine Name might be declared in all the earth*. The state of things required this to be done, for the whole world, including the Israelites themselves as we have seen, was fast settling into a state of complete and incorrigible barbarism. God’s purpose ultimately to populate the earth with obedient men (put to the proof in days of evil), required that this state of things should be broken into, and that His existence should be palpably

demonstrated, and His will established in a form sufficiently influential to effect intended moral results in the generations following. How was this to be done without the display of His power in a visible and intelligible manner? The answer is obvious, and paves the way for a survey of the extraordinary incidents by which this display was effected.

A beginning was made with Moses—which was according to the fitness of things. As already remarked, he was living in pastoral, seclusion, tending the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law, in the desert of Horeb. He was a man of the right stamp for the divine purpose, but not a man of such characteristics as would have led him to contrive and execute a scheme of national liberation. It is easy to glean his character from the whole narrative. It justifies the description that he was “a meek man”—a man of quiet disposition, with no liking for the stir and bustle of public life. He lacked the personal energy and ambition that would lead to patriotic initiative. This is shown by the way he viewed the divine proposal that he should go to Egypt as Jehovah’s instrument to effect Israel’s deliverance. Even after all his preliminary difficulties had been disposed of, he said, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant: I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue: O my Lord, send I pray Thee by the hand of him by whom Thou wilt send.” It was not altogether wonderful that he should thus be diffident. He was eighty years old: he had been a long time out of public life: his early expectations had all quieted down. Disappointment, and adversity, and delay, had sobered him thoroughly, added to which he was naturally meek, quiet, and of slow speech. He was the last man for the execution of the work on human principles. But for a work to be required modesty of self estimate, a deep sense of Yahweh’s done on divine principles, he was the very man. This work greatness, a disposition to be scrupulously faithful in the carrying out of divine instructions, and a capacity for unbounded patience and magnanimity with those with whom he might be called upon to deal. These qualities, in some degree natural to him, had been matured and perfected by forty years’ banishment, and the unexciting monotonies of sheep-tending in the solitudes of a desert country.

This man—the right man—who proved faithful in all his house, and more honoured than all men, save his unapproachable Antitype, in being permitted intercourse with Yahweh face to face—this man who became the most renowned of all history—was following his usual occupations near the Mount of Horeb, in the wilderness of Sinai, at the time we are considering, when the crisis of divine interference was impending. The hour had struck for God to act (by angelic hands). The mode adopted to secure the attention of Moses was suited to the circumstances. A bush on the mountain side was wrapped in flame. Possibly this was not unusual, but that which was unusual was that this bush went on burning without consuming and without extending the fire to others. When a sufficient time had elapsed to show that this was the fact, the curiosity of Moses was aroused, as any man’s would be, at such a sight. He said “I will now turn aside and see this great sight; why the bush is not burnt.” When he had approached the bush sufficiently, the divine speech saluted his ear, calling his name twice, “Moses, Moses.”

This was the beginning of the great and mighty work with the house of Israel which has already affected the condition of mankind in the most palpable manner, but the true nature and scope of which will only be generally apprehended when scattered Israel is regathered to Jehovah’s land, and all the earth brought under subjection to the sceptre of the Lord Jesus, the prophet like unto Moses, whom they shall hear as predicted, and who will rule all nations gloriously, on the throne of David his father, in the day when that throne, having been re-established, the whole human family will taste for the first time the sweets of true and righteous government, and give praise to Jehovah and His anointed in all the earth.