

“Seeing Providence: The Early Years”

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“And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, ‘Because I drew him out of the water.’” (Exodus 2:10)

In our series on “Seeing Providence,” we will be looking at how the Lord cares for us at different times and stages of our lives. This week we are focusing on how the Lord leads us and guides us during our early years of childhood and the teenage years.

The story of Moses’ mother Jochebed hiding baby Moses in an ark in the Nile river to keep him safe from Pharaoh and the Egyptians can symbolically describe the ways that the Lord watched over us when we were young and kept us spiritually safe during the early years when we were growing up. Our early years are a time of life, perhaps more than others, when we are oblivious to the ways the Lord provides for us, much like baby Moses was oblivious to the protection provided by his family, as well as the *need* for protection because of the situation with the Egyptians.

As we heard in our lessons, we are all born into a state of innocence, which is our true inner core (see AC 3183). “Innocence” - which literally means “harmlessness” - is the part of us that is willing to be led by the Lord (see HH 276-283), and so it is the part of us that seeks to not harm anyone, from the Lord’s love for everyone. And even though *true* innocence requires maturity and wisdom, we are all still born into the *potential* for angelic innocence since, as the Writings tell us, “everyone is born for heaven” (HH 329). And as it says in the book *Heaven and Hell*:

“Since innocence, for heaven's angels, is the very essence of what is good, we can see that the divine good emanating from the Lord is innocence itself, inasmuch as it is this good that flows into angels, moves their deepest natures, and aligns and adapts them to accept all the blessings of heaven. Much the same happens with infants, whose deeper natures are not only formed by the passage of innocence from the Lord but are also constantly adapted and aligned to accept the good of heavenly love, because the good of innocence acts from deep within, being, as already noted, the very essence of all good.” (HH 282)

As we heard in our recitation, the kingdom of God can be seen in the states of our early childhood (see Mark 10:13-16).

And so there is a part of us from the very beginning of our lives, that is created in the image of God; the image of Goodness and Truth. In our early years, through the Lord’s providence, we were introduced into more and more conscious experiences of goodness and truth through the care of our families, friends, and mentors. Whenever we had experiences of love as we grew up, those experiences were stored away by the Lord in our inner core, as what are called in the Writings: “remnants” or “remains.” Remnants of goodness and truth (see AC 5894). Hints of the heaven that the Lord is leading us to.

But of course, evil spirits want to destroy anything good and true in us, just as Pharaoh and the Egyptians sought to destroy the children of Israel. And so one of the goals of the Lord’s providence is to protect those remnants of goodness and truth and the innocence of our early years, just as Jochebed sought to protect baby Moses. But how can something so precious, so

vulnerable, and so seemingly weak be protected in the face of the powers of hell in our lives? Well, the answer might seem somewhat counter-intuitive. Jochebed hid baby Moses in a basket in one of the largest rivers on the planet. That would not necessarily have been the first idea that came to my mind. And yet it symbolically describes how the Lord protects our own inner child as well, as we are growing up.

We may be inclined to identify with Moses in this story, but the Writings tell us that we are actually the *ark* with Moses inside (AC 639, 6713). *Moses* symbolizes the beginnings of goodness and truth in our internals, but the *ark* symbolizes our externals (see AC 6715). And the external of the ark was actually not very pleasant. It was covered with “asphalt and pitch” or black, sticky tar to waterproof the ark. The Writings tell us that this asphalt and pitch represents the evils and falsities that are part of our external nature as we grow up (see AC 6724). And the Nile river itself - which the ark was placed in - represents falsity; the reeds of the river representing “false factual knowledge” (AC 6726).

If we think about it, this describes our early years pretty well. Even though innocence is at our core when we are young, our externals are full of bad habits and false information. I’m going to hazard a guess that everyone of us threw at least one temper tantrum when we were young. Those temper tantrums and bad habits are like the sticky tar covering the ark of Moses. Not pleasant. And yet, through the watchful eyes of Providence, we can know that there is something precious being preserved inside.

In our early years we also find ourselves in a constant stream of “false factual knowledge,” like the stream of the Nile river. When we look back on our own childhoods, or when we witness the childhood of a loved one, we can recognize that most of what we think and say in our early years is not completely true. We may have told ourselves that “I will never be good enough,” or that “my parents won’t love me unless I’m perfect,” or “I never get what I want,” or “I can’t be happy unless I my brother stops whistling.” The thought patterns of our early years are full of black-and-white thinking and inaccurate perspectives on the world and our lives that can cause pain and upset. And yet, through the eyes of love, we can recognize that there are remnants of goodness and truth within that false factual knowledge, just as baby Moses was hidden in the ark in the Nile river. As the Writings describe it,

“This stage is a state of ignorance and of innocence within that ignorance and is called early childhood. ... For the entire length of this stage, our inner levels are being formed for their [future] role and are therefore inaccessible. Only our most superficial levels, the levels of our sensory self, lie open.” (AC 10225.1-4)

This situation continues into our teenage years as well. We find ourselves floating in the falsity of the Nile river when we tell ourselves things like: “Crying is a sign of weakness,” or “That happened to me because I’m a bad person,” or “Anger is not an ok feeling to have,” or “If I just have more money, then I’ll be happy,” or “True justice needs to involve punishment,” or “It’s better to be right than to be kind.” We all go through immature states as we grow up, which are referred to in the Writings as the “Ishmael Rational” (see AC 1948-1951), and it’s not pleasant to experience or witness these states. And yet, it can be comforting to know that in Providence the Lord is watching over us as we float in that Nile river, and that it’s not necessarily the end of our story. In reference to baby Moses in the ark, the Writings say the following:

“While we are being reformed we are, so far as our internal is concerned, preserved by the Lord in a state of goodness and truth; but so far as our external is concerned we are let into our evils and falsities. We are as a consequence among spirits from hell who are governed by such evils and falsities. These spirits flit around us, trying in every way to destroy us. But the goodness and truth that flow into us through our internal give us such protection that the spirits from hell cannot harm us in the slightest.... Good can then be among evils and falsities and yet remain safe from harm. Everyone who is being reformed is brought into this state, so that the evil desires and false ideas that govern us are removed and good desires and true ideas are implanted instead.” (AC 6724.2)

The Lord’s providential care for us in our early years can also be seen in the character of Miriam, Moses’ sister. We can imagine that Moses’ mother Jochebed may have asked Miriam to keep an eye on him, just as the Lord employs angels to watch over us. “Angels from the Lord...lead and protect a person, doing so every instant and fraction of an instant” (AC 5992.3). And yet we are primarily unaware of this angelic protection, just as baby Moses may not have been aware of the presence of Miriam. I like to think that perhaps Miriam spoke gently to Moses to try to reassure him that he was safe, even though he couldn’t see her. Similarly, we can’t see the presence of angels, but we might occasionally hear their sweet, comforting words in our hearts. We might even look back on our childhood years and think how fortunate we were in something that felt lucky, not realizing at the time that there was an angelic Miriam watching over us (see DP 212; NJHD 276; AC 5508.2, 8717.3).

It is amazing how the Lord’s providence protects us in our early years, just as it was amazing that baby Moses was protected in the ark in the Nile river. And yet, Moses couldn’t stay in that ark forever. At some point he was going to need to come out. Similarly, we need to go through a spiritual process in which the remnant goodness and truth in our internals comes out into our externals as well. But that process can be just as scary for us as it might have felt for Moses and his family. It can feel vulnerable to open up to the inner child that the Lord has been preserving through our early years. It takes just the right environments to create the safety needed for that kind of spiritual growth, in which we open up the ark of our lives. And those environments are provided by the character of Pharaoh’s daughter in this story.

Pharaoh’s daughter represents an affection for factual knowledge (AC 6750). Another way to say that is that she represents the state of curiosity. She is described in the Writings as representing our “eagerness to know” something (AC 6734). Think of how providential it is that the Lord provided us all with a natural curiosity as we were growing up; just as it was providential that Pharaoh’s daughter found Moses in the ark. That eagerness to know something, which occurs naturally in children, is what can begin to create the environment needed for us to learn truths from the Lord’s word which will help us become the angels we were born to be. Without curiosity we would have a hard time learning the truths that can lead us in life. Without Pharaoh’s daughter Moses would never have become the leader he became (see AC 6751).

Pharaoh’s daughter also represents compassion. “For when anyone looks with charity on someone in distress, as Pharaoh’s daughter does here on the child crying in the box made of rush, a feeling of compassion is aroused. And since the feeling is stirred by the Lord, it is an alerting by Him. Indeed when people who are perceptive have feelings of compassion they know that they are being alerted by the Lord to offer help” (AC 6737).

Whether we experience the feeling of compassion in ourselves, or whether we experience the compassion of others for us, this is a really important state in our spiritual lives which can

create the safety needed for us to connect with the innocence at our core. Compassion is what allows us to look past the bad habits and false ideas of our externals or another person's externals (the ark) to the remnant goodness and truth at the core of each one of us (baby Moses). Without compassion, our true selves often remain hidden under the unpleasant externals of life, floating in false factual knowledge. What an amazing act of Providence that the Lord can stir feelings of compassion in us, even at an early age.

Pharaoh's daughter called the baby in the ark "Moses," which means "drawn out." (see Exodus 2:10; AC 6753). In the Lord's providence our true self can survive the bad habits and false ideas of childhood. The Lord is watching over us during that time of our life, and keeping remnant states of goodness and truth in us safe from the hells. And with the blessings of the Lord providing us with natural states of curiosity and compassion, our true self can begin to be drawn out as we grow up, just as Pharaoh's daughter drew Moses out of the ark in the water. We can be drawn out of our perfectionism. We can be drawn out of our critical judgmentalism. We can be drawn out of immature black-and-white patterns of thinking. We can be drawn out of the "Ishmael Rational" state of mind. We can be drawn out of our selfishness and bad habits. How amazing is that? We can go through those states in our childhood and teenage years, and yet the angel that we were born to become can survive them, just as Moses survived in the ark in reeds of the Nile river. And just as Moses was returned to his mother, we can return to the states of innocence that we were born into, eventually coming into the innocence of wisdom that is the life of heaven. As it says in *Heaven and Hell*:

"Innocence is the vessel of everything heavenly and therefore children's innocence is a matrix for all the affections for what is good and true. ... Children's innocence, though, is not real innocence, because it still lacks wisdom. Real innocence is wisdom because to the extent that we are wise we want to be led by the Lord.... So children are brought through from the outward innocence that characterizes them at first, which is called the innocence of infancy, to the inner innocence that is the innocence of wisdom. This latter innocence is the goal of their whole process of instruction. Consequently, when they arrive at the innocence of wisdom, the innocence of infancy that had served them as a matrix in the interim is united to them." (HH 341)

This is how the Lord provides for us in our early years. As it says in the Psalms:

"He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support. He also brought me out into a broad place; He delivered me because He delighted in me." (Psalm 18:16-19)

Amen.

Lessons:

Exodus 2:1-10

AC 3183, 5894, 5992, 10225