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THE PATTERN OF DIVINE INTERVENTION - PT 1

By David Schnittger

The Bible presents Yahweh God as both transcendent and immanent. By transcendent, we mean that He stands beyond and is unaffected in His essential being by the circumstances of earth and the universe. By immanent, we mean that He is, at the same time, concerned and intimately involved in the affairs of this universe, and, in particular, with mankind. As such, God has chosen to be responsive to man's actions, whether judging and punishing sin and unbelief, or granting merciful intervention in response to man's repentance and faith. It is the latter subject that we will explore in this article.

In this upcoming series of articles, we will explore what the Bible says about "divine interventions;" in particular, societal or national interventions. We will look at examples of such interventions, both those that are recorded in biblical history as well as those that have taken place in church history. I believe that, as we look at these examples, a pattern will emerge. The examples we will consider in this series of articles include:

- Israel during the time of the Exodus
- Nineveh/Assyria during the time of Jonah
- Judah during the Babylonian Captivity
- America during the First Revolution
- England during the Second World War
- America during the Second Revolution

The purpose of this study is not merely historical or academic. We will employ what we learn from these historical examples to try to discern, as best we can, whether America is in the midst of a gracious divine intervention, and what we, as born again and Bible believing children of God, should do in such a time as this, recognizing that such interventions are temporary and conditional.

THE PROMISE OF DIVINE INTERVENTION

Before we move to the specific topic of divine intervention, it is necessary to address the larger topic of the providence of God. Though the word “providence” does not occur in the Bible, it does represent a truly biblical doctrine. According to T.H.L. Parker, the doctrine of providence may be viewed from three different angles:

1. The creation is the stage on which are enacted God’s dealings with mankind. Providence is God’s gracious outworking of His purpose in Christ which issues in His dealings with man.
2. God’s providence served also the purpose of bearing witness to God among the heathen. God’s fatherly care was a sign, pointing to Himself. Romans 1:20 makes it clear the purpose of this witness of providence was simply to render man inexcusable for not knowing God.
3. The God who gives man life also preserves him while he is on the earth.

In sum, the doctrine of providence tells us that the world and our lives are not ruled by chance or by fate but by God, who lays bare His purposes of providence in the incarnation of his Son.¹

Divine intervention, either in judgment or mercy, is, therefore, an outworking of divine providence. In this section, I would like to examine general promises of divine intervention, as the foundation for the examination of specific instances of divine intervention. The first such promise is found in Psalm 22:4, 5: “Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.”

This Psalm is known as the “Psalm of the Cross.” This amazing psalm is a prophetic description of the future crucifixion of God’s Son, written a thousand years before its fulfillment and describing in graphic detail the suffering of Christ on the cross. In this midst of this first-person narrative of His own future sufferings on the cross, Jesus declares in verses four and five how His father, Yahweh God, had delivered Israel on many occasions, but yet He would not be delivered from the agonies of crucifixion as we see in verse six. Notice the contrasting conjunction that begins this verse: “*But* I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.” The psalmist, David, is making a contrast with God’s normal mode of operation toward His people. Normally, God’s people “. . . cried unto thee, and were delivered . . .” However, in the case of Christ, God the Father, in His amazing

¹¹ T.H.L. Parker, “Providence of God.” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 890, 891.

redemptive plan, chose NOT to intervene in the sufferings of His only begotten Son. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus Christ, in this prophetic passage, declares that Yahweh's "normal modus operandi" is to intervene in deliverance to those who cry to Him and trust in Him.

Another passage which declares God's promise to intervene in deliverance in response to belief, is seen in Psalm 50:15: "And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." In contrast to the call of faith, and subsequent deliverance, the psalmist contrasts this with the fate of the wicked in verse 16: "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth?" In short, God promises deliverance to those who call upon Him with a believing heart, but promises nothing but judgment to the wicked.

The most well-known passage promising divine intervention is found in 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." While this verse is well known among believers as a promise of mercy, it is noteworthy that this verse occurs in the context of, and as the antidote to, divine judgment. In verse 13 we read: "If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people;" In other words, the national repentance of 2 Chronicles 7:14 is seen as the remedy for national divine judgment!

It appears that the breadth of the sin and impending judgment must be matched in breadth by the humbling, praying, repentance and turning from sin of the people in order for national intervention to take place. Does this promise give indication of a *pattern* that may exist when instances of national divine intervention take place? We will explore that question as we look at examples of national divine intervention.

THE EXODUS INTERVENTION

In this section, we are going to examine the Divine intervention that took place with Israel at the time of the Exodus. We are going to look at the main points of this intervention and then discern whether there is a pattern evident in this intervention. In subsequent articles, as we look at other examples of national intervention, we will explore whether this same pattern is evident. The purpose of this study is to discern the times in which we live to see if America is in the midst of yet another gracious Divine national intervention.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING



Joseph in Egypt

At the outset, it is helpful to establish the circumstances that brought Israel into Egypt in the first place, as well as the promises attached to that event. In the providence of God, Joseph, though betrayed and rejected by his brothers, came to a place of great prominence in Egypt. In the course of time, famine brought Jacob and his sons to Egypt seeking help. Once Joseph's identity became known to his aged father, Jacob was directed by the Lord to relocate his family to Egypt:

“And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father; fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt: and I will also surely bring thee up again . . .” (Gen 46:2-4).

All went well with Israel in their new homeland for many years, but after the death of Joseph, the favor that the Hebrews enjoyed in Egypt began to sour.

Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said, unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: 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, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore, they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field, all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour (Exodus 1:8-14).

It is interesting that, immediately following the description of Hebrew suffering, the narrative shifts to the birth of Moses in Exodus 2. Despite Pharaoh's edict that all Hebrew babies were to be killed at birth, Exodus 2 records the deliverance of baby Moses into Pharaoh's own household. We read of

God's providential care of the future deliverer in Exodus 2:10: "And the child grew, and she (Moses' mother, Jochebed) brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water." While Moses was growing in Pharaoh's household, the plight of the Hebrews worsened over time.

And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them (Ex 2:23-25).



Israelis in Egyptian bondage

The suffering of the Hebrews under hard Egyptian bondage became so acute that God Himself heard their groanings, and, no doubt, their earnest prayers. Along with the hearing came the remembrance of His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These covenant promises included the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 15:13, 14: "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance."

GOD'S RESPONSE TO THEIR CONDITION

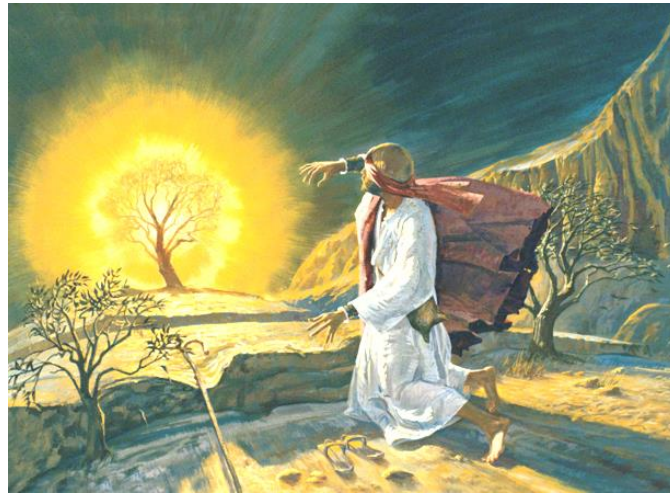
In response to the groanings of God's people, and in remembrance of His covenant promises to the patriarchs, the Lord activated His "rescue plan" by raising up Moses to be their reluctant deliverer.

Moses was an unlikely choice for this assignment. Not only was Moses absent from Egypt, but the cause of his absence was scandalous. We read of the event that sent Moses into self-exile in Exodus 2:11-15:

And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw there was no man, he slew the Egyptians, and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy

fellow: And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? Intendest thou to kill me as thou killedst the Egyptians? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses, But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian . . .”

At this point of God’s call to Moses, he had been sidelined in Midian for forty years tending sheep. Undoubtedly, this humble task was preparing him for the great challenge of shepherding the fickle and faithless host of Israel. The time had come to put those preparations into action. Immediately following the narrative of Exodus 2:23-25, God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and commanded Moses to lead Israel out of Egyptian bondage:



Moses and the Burning Bush

And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt (Ex 3:7-10).

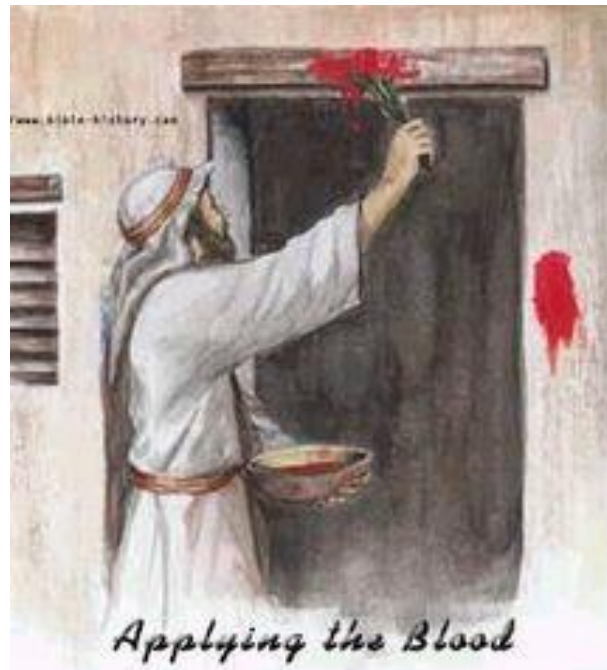
Moses was quick to mount the argument for his inadequacy for this gargantuan task. Not only was he reluctant, he was resolute in his refusal.

And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast thou spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say. And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. And thou shalt

Speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do (Ex 4:10-15).

At the very least, Moses considered himself to be an imperfect and improbable choice for so great a task as the deliverer of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage. It is also quite likely that Moses' reputation among the Hebrews was stained as a result of murdering the Egyptian so many years before. Moses had no idea how he would be received by his brethren upon his return. Beyond that, was the even greater challenge of overcoming resistance by the pharaoh. We learn of that resistance in Exodus 5:1, 2:

And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.



Israel's Deliverance Passover

Thus, began the great contest of wills between the hardhearted pharaoh and the persistent Moses. This contest, involving ten increasingly severe plagues, culminated in the Angel of Death taking every firstborn of Egypt, including the pharaoh's oldest son.

Israel was spared God's judgment on the firstborn by keeping the Passover. God gave specific instructions for the slaying and eating of the sacrificial lamb, as recorded in Exodus 12:12,13:

For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the house where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

It was this plague that, for a time, broke the pharaoh's resistance:



Pharaoh's Dead Son

And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel, and go serve the LORD, as ye have said, Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also. And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men. And the people took the dough before it was leavened, their kneadingtroughs being bound up in the clothes upon their shoulders. And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they requested. And they spoiled the Egyptians (Ex 12:31-36).

The deliverance of the Hebrews from the greedy grasp of Pharaoh was not yet complete. One more act of divine judgment was to befall the Egyptians. God hardened Pharaoh's heart once more and he pursued the Hebrews to the edge of the Red Sea. It was there, in a dramatic act of faith, the Lord parted the seas, bringing deliverance to the Hebrews and judgment to the Egyptians:

But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen (Ex 14:16-18).



Egyptian Chariot in the Red Sea

It is noteworthy that the persistently rebellious Pharaoh, whose entire life was devoted to dishonoring Yahweh, finally brought honor to the Lord . . . in his death!

THE EXODUS PATTERN OF DIVINE INTERVENTION

I believe that we see in the Exodus narrative the beginning of a pattern of divine intervention. Let me summarize it as follows: *1) A needy people cry out to God in desperation. 2) God has respect to their cry and raises up an imperfect person, who, 3) against the resistance of the wicked establishment, is 4) God's agent to affect deliverance.* In subsequent articles, we will see whether this Exodus intervention is an anomaly or a pattern of divine intervention.

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