

The Past is Prologue

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History is a highly important topic of study for several reasons. First it tells us something about our heritage (ethnic and/or national), and secondly it teaches us lessons about what has worked and what hasn't worked regarding progress, security, economic stability and the general welfare of our nation as a whole. The study of history also gives us great examples to follow and others to avoid, whether they are the decisions of famous people, the issuance of public policies or the results economic decisions that affect the individual or the entire country. One of the reasons for a national archive is to record the events of the past and provide a chronicle regarding the long term effects of legislative, judicial and executive decision making over the years.

This essay has nothing at all to do with national history but very much to do with the personal history of each one reading, and the one writing, the thoughts contained herein. When we read a book of any significant length it is generally preceded by a prologue that gives some idea of the subject matter to be covered in the main body of the book. Our past, the years prior to each of us becoming a committed Christian, is a prologue to the real story and importance of the life that God has planned for us while serving in His Kingdom on earth. Most of us were unaware of His working in our lives and the reasons for His allowing certain things to occur but there was a definite logic behind every moment of every hour and day that we lived between our physical birth and our spiritual re-birth in Christ. The apostle Paul once wrote, *For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.* Philippians 2:13.

David wrote this in Psalm 139:16, *All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.* God's will for our lives was planned before we were

ever born, or even later, born again. The plan is perfect and purposeful and we should discover exactly what His plan is for us if we are ever to be effective and fulfilled servants of God.

Moses

Moses was arguably one of the greatest servants ever to be used of God. In fact he was so highly revered by God and the people of Israel that God hid his burial plot so that his grave would not be venerated or become an object of worship for the Jews in the years that followed his death. We are told in Deuteronomy 34:6, that the Lord *“buried him...but to this day no one knows where his grave is.”*

Moses was born into an Israelite’s home, but for the first 40 years of his life he was raised in the palace of the Egyptian king, known as Pharaoh. Steven testified to this in Acts 7:20-22 where we read, *For three months he was cared for in his father’s house... Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son...Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians...* God was preparing Moses to think, talk and behave like an Egyptian so that one day he could be used to negotiate the release of the Israelite nation from their 400 year bondage in slavery. The best negotiator is the one who understands the mindset of his adversary. He was born as an Israelite to ultimately lead the exodus of the Israeli nation from their home in Egypt, but God had an interim plan that was to prepare him for that mighty task.

When Moses turned 40 he was in the market place one day when he noticed an Israelite being abused by an Egyptian. He broke up the attack and in the process killed the Egyptian. Soon thereafter, running for his life he escaped to Midian, a country located in what is now known as the Arabian Peninsula.

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There he worked as a farmer, took a Midian wife and was hired by his father-in-law to work in his fields. This was also part of God’s plan to toughen the 40 year old man who had grown up relatively sheltered and pampered as an aristocrat. After living the rugged life of a sheep rancher Moses would be prepared for the task that God had in mind all

along, the leading of the nation of Israel out of the bondage in Egypt and into the wilderness, where they were to wander for 40 years.

The real purpose of Moses life was thus not realized until he had reached the age of 80. By that age, most of us think that we are useless to the plan and purpose of God. It was then that God would use him to convince Pharaoh to let his people go which he did that by performing the miracles of the ten plagues Moses also set about the task of informing the people of Israel concerning the stipulations for Passover, leading them across the dry bottom of the Red Sea that had miraculously parted as they entered and then by receiving the Ten Commandments on Mt Sinai; the Decalogue that we cherish to this very day. Moses only problem was his failure to trust God enough to lead his people into the promised land shortly after they had arrived in the wilderness. Because of that lack of leadership, Moses and all who failed to trust God, would wander for 40 years and never enter the promised land of Canaan. Only Joshua and Caleb, men who had wanted to trust God and enter the promised land at Kadesh-Barnea and all who were born after that fateful, faithless decision, would eventually cross the Jordan River and enter the land that God had promised to Abraham nearly 600 years earlier.

Thus we see, that Moses' past, his 40 years of existence in the affluent lifestyle of an Egyptian aristocrat, followed by his 40 years of toil on a ranch in Midian following the rugged lifestyle of sheep herder was merely a prologue to God's real purpose for his life.

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Saul of Tarsus

The man we know and love as the apostle Paul (his gentile name) was born Saul (his Jewish name) in the city of Tarsus in the country of Cilicia. It was a Roman colony and thus all who were born there were considered citizens of Rome. This would prove to be highly beneficial to Paul late in his ministry since he could appeal to Rome and override the Jewish leader's desire to kill him. The city was known for its vast educational and

commercial pursuits. The intellectual community was often compared with those of Athens and Alexandria. Paul would take advantage of the informative opportunities, and gain a knowledge that would eventually serve him well in his capacity to become one of the history's greatest Christian apologists. When we see him defend the faith at the Areopagus in Athens (Chapter 17 of Acts) we are thoroughly convinced of his great knowledge and his ability to confound even the most erudite of all philosophers. In fact we read of one person's opinion regarding Paul's knowledge in the words of Festus who said, "*You are out of your mind, Paul... Your great learning is driving you insane.*" (Acts 26:24). That individual was trusting the old somewhat fallacious axiom that "There exists a fine line between genius and insanity." Paul promptly responded to the accusation by saying, "*I am not insane, most excellent Festus... what I am saying is true and reasonable.*"

After growing up in Tarsus, Paul traveled to Jerusalem and studied under the great Jewish scholar Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) where he learned Jewish law and all of the necessary information that would eventually qualify him to become a Pharisee. Paul was multilingual, fluent in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and the Jewish common dialect, Aramaic. That articulate speech in four major languages would allow him to speak effortlessly throughout his foreign missionary journeys in the years that would eventually

come and that would serve God's real purpose for his life as he spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentile world.

Paul (nee Saul) also had to learn some very positive lessons about Christians of the first century. His greatest teachers in that regard were Stephan, the first Christian martyr, who was stoned to death by the Jews as a young Saul stood by. He was also mentored by the man from Cyprus who would be his earliest and best friend in the faith; Barnabus (whose name means "son of encouragement")

Stephan taught Paul a great deal about compassion and grace as he observed the way he died, praying to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and asking Him to forgive those who were murdering him. Stephan's dying words were, "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them.*" (Acts 7:60) Barnabus, on the other hand showed the test of true friendship. When all others feared Paul, because he had persecuted the church in its earliest years and had sentenced many believers to death, Barnabus vouched for Paul and his true conversion to Christ. It was also Barnabus who would seek Paul out, from his home church in Antioch and attest to his role as God's chosen servant to reach the Gentile world for Christ. In that role, Barnabus accompanied Paul during his first missionary journey.

Thus, the past years that Saul had spent in formal, secular education in a Roman ruled Gentile city called Tarsus, his religious training in Jewish law under Gamaliel and his pivotal role in persecuting the church in his early years were simply a prologue to God's real call on his life of evangelism and missionary service.

A Reprobate Physician, Called of God

While I would very much like to forget my past life, the 34 years which I had lived before being spiritually awakened (made alive Ephesians 2:5) from my deadness and darkness in sin, effectually called by God (Romans 8:30), gifted with faith to believe (Ephesians 2:8-9) As I gaze back with regret. I can see that in many respects that past life as an infidel was in reality a prologue to the real purpose for which God had granted me physical life in the beginning. Many of you know that, if I have one spiritual gift, it is that of teaching. I take no credit for that, and I do not boast, for whom in their right mind can logically boast of a gift? In order to utilize that gift, that was given to me on the day

of my spiritual new birth, June 28, 1970, God was preparing me to use it during the past prologue years that had preceded that miraculous, life changing event.

Throughout my high school, college and medical school training I had an absolute fear of public speaking. I vividly recall the dread I had of conducting meetings during my year as president of my medical fraternity. That trepidation carried over into my year of internship and later into my early months in the United States Air Force. A series of events, planned and purposed by God would eventually change my fear of public speaking. It was during the fall of my internship year that I incurred a peptic ulcer. I was at the time a very heavy cigarette smoker. On the advice of a fellow physician I quit smoking so that my ulcer would heal. I never again took up that habit. I went cold turkey from a two pack per day habit, during a very stressful intern year to no cigarettes over night. That was a miracle of major proportions, and I am certain that God played a major role in my success at conquering a highly addictive substance.

During my first few months at Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina, in 1962, the then Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Luther Terry, sent orders to all military bases

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regarding the need for an intensive instruction of the troops and their dependants concerning the ill effects of tobacco on the human body. As the only non-smoker among 22 physicians at Shaw AFB, my commanding officer ordered me to prepare a one hour lecture with slides. I was to present the lecture once a week at 4 pm on Fridays until I had reached every squadron on the base; there were fifty and thus it would take one year to reach them all.

When I told the commander, a full bird colonel, that I had two problems with his order, he asked what they might be. Number one, I knew nothing about the ill effects of tobacco. We were not taught that during my years in medical school (1957-1961). He informed me that the information had been sent by the surgeon general and it was in several cartons in the base hospital library. Then he asked what my second problem

was. I told him that I was not a public speaker. He promptly said, "No problem Captain, you will become one." That I did. It was all part of God's plan in preparing me for the time when I would begin to speak and teach for him beginning in 1970. However, between 1962 and 1970 my public speaking skills were honed even further as I became a speaker for the American Heart association, the American Cancer Society, the Drug Enforcement team in Youngstown, the Lung Association and the Rotary Club. The past was truly a prologue to my years of serving my Lord and Savior ever since.

That was the first of many situations, as I reflect back upon my life before and since I received Christ, that have been used of God to fulfill His plan and purpose in my life. My training in the sciences has enabled me to passionately defend first the Creation Science and later the Intelligent Design movement and my bout with depression (for no discernable reason at the time) would be used of God to encourage and treat many others who would be sent my way for support.

The Leadership Lessons at Old North

Over the past several months over 400 men have had available to them the leadership training afforded by the staff of Old North using the book entitled *Spiritual Leadership* by J. Oswald Sanders. Every one of the men who took advantage of that training program have a past that is a prologue to the way in which God will use them as leaders in the home, workplace, community and church. I would urge each man who has attended that course, or who has at least read the book, to examine his past life and see just how God may have been working there in ways that he never realized. I would also urge each one to discover his spiritual gift (See Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12) to find out just how much the lessons learned in the past can benefit and embellish the usefulness of the particular spiritual gift, or gifts, now possessed. The adversities, educational pursuits, special talents and the manner in which God drew you to Christ are all significant parts of the puzzle that the Lord fit together to form a picture of your former

life experiences which He had allowed to happen for His glory. Viewing that picture as a whole, with God's plan in mind, will cause you to stand in awe of the ways in which He orchestrated your years of life for His own purposes. Your past is only a prologue to the present and future uses for which God has saved you. (See Ephesians 2:10)

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