

Exodus 6: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Exodus chapter 6 But the Lord said to Moses, Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh, for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.

God spoke to Moses and said to him, I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them.

I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel, whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.

Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with great acts of judgment.

I will take you to be my people, and I will be your guard, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

[1 : 08] I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord. Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery.

So the Lord said to Moses, Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt, to let the people of Israel go out of his land. But Moses said to the Lord, Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me.

How then shall Pharaoh listen to me? For I am of uncircumcised lips. But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a charge about the people of Israel, and about Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

These are the heads of their fathers' houses, the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, Hanak, Palu, Hezron, and Carmi.

These are the clans of Reuben. The sons of Simeon, Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shul, the son of a Canaanite woman.

[2 : 17] These are the clans of Simeon. These are the names of the sons of Levi, according to their generations. Gershon, Kohath, and Morari, the years of the life of Levi being 137 years.

The sons of Gershon, Libnai, and Shimei, by their clans. The sons of Kohath, Amram, Ishar, Hebron, and Uzziel, the years of the life of Kohath being 133 years.

The sons of Morari, Mali, and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites, according to their generations. Amram took as his wife, Jochebed, his father's sister, and she bore him Aaron and Moses, the years of the life of Amram, being 137 years.

The sons of Ishar, Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. The sons of Uziel, Mishael, El-Zaphon, and Sithri. Aaron took as his wife, Elishabab, the daughter of Aminadab, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

The sons of Korah, Asir, Elkanah, and Abiasaf. These are the clans of the Korahites. Eleazar, Aaron's son, took as his wife, one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phineas.

[3 : 36] These are the heads of the father's houses of the Levites by their clans. These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts.

It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the people of Israel from Egypt, this Moses and this Aaron. On the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, the Lord said to Moses, I am the Lord.

Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you. But Moses said to the Lord, Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?

Exodus chapter 6 presents the answer to Moses' problem at the end of Exodus chapter 5. Moses has ended that chapter feeling disheartened by the failure of his initial approach to Pharaoh.

But God here assures him that he has the situation under control. Pharaoh will drive and send out the Israelites with a strong hand. The hand is a recurring theme throughout the Exodus narrative.

[4 : 40] That's a term worth paying attention to. In verse 2, God gives Moses a fresh call and commission. And Moses' initial call is reconfirmed here in a way that recalls his initial call of Exodus chapter 3.

If we hold the two passages alongside each other, we'll see many different parallels. For instance, between 3 verses 6 to 8 and 14 to 15 and 6 verses 2 to 8, God declares his name and the fact that he has seen the distress of his people in both places.

In 4 verse 10, we can see similarities with the second half of 6 verse 12. In 4 verse 16, there are parallels with 7 verse 1.

Moses is made as God to Aaron, and then Moses is as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron is his prophet. In verse 19 and following of chapter 3, there are parallels with chapter 6 verse 7, and chapter 7 verse 4 following.

There's a promise to bring them out with great and powerful acts of judgment. And God's speech to Moses in verses 2 to 8 begins and ends with the words, I am the Lord.

[5 : 54] The response to Moses' discouragement is a reminder of the one whom he serves. The expression, I am the Lord, can also be seen as a sort of redoubling of God's name. God is, I am, and God declares, I am the Lord.

It is here as if God is preaching the gospel of the Exodus to Moses in his disheartened state. He is recalling him to the fact of his presence and his identity. God will bring them out.

He will redeem them, and he will deliver them. By beginning and ending by declaring his name, God is also tying the pronouncement directly to his divine identity and his attributes.

He is reminding Moses of the revelation to the patriarchs, his work with the patriarchs, the covenant with the patriarchs, God's recognition of the state of his people in Egypt, his commitment to them, his promise to redeem them.

God will redeem them as a kinsman redeemer, was committed to deliver his near relation. He also makes a covenant-style promise that he will deliver them, by tying his future name to what he is about to accomplish.

[7 : 00] I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And then finally, he gives the promise of the land.

The very central of all of this is God's commitment to be his people's God, and for them to be his people. He's preaching the gospel, as it were, of the Exodus to Moses, so that Moses can be reassured that God has things under control.

This mission is not a failure. God will bring it to completion. God has committed his own identity to this. Verse 2 begins this statement by telling us that God spoke this way to Moses, and verse 9 tells us that Moses declared these words to the people of Israel.

It's as if we have the words given to us, and we're then told at the end, thus Moses said to the people of Israel. God's speech to Moses seems to achieve its initial purpose.

It takes the disheartened prophet, and encourages him, and gets him moving again. And so by the end of the speech, we see that the words that we've just read are not just God's words spoken directly to Moses, but the words of God being reported by Moses to the children of Israel.

[8 : 10] Moses has been revived in his spirit, and now he's speaking to the people, but they are still disheartened, and they're not listening or hearing these words of encouragement. God speaks to Moses again, and tells him to go to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and to tell him to let the people of Israel go out of his land.

But Moses still has issues. The people of Israel have not listened to him. How can he expect Pharaoh to listen to him in that case? And he points to his own problem, that he's a person of uncircumcised lips.

It's quite possible that Moses had a speech impediment, a stutter or something like that, that made it difficult for him to speak. He is someone who has an untamed tongue, an uncircumcised tongue, a tongue that is not functioning as it ought to.

And so he feels totally inadequate for this purpose. But having presented this problem, and the fact that he has not been listened to by the people, remember that Moses is someone who is in many respects an outsider.

He's someone who's grown up as an Egyptian. He's not really recognised by his people. And so his place is precarious and uncertain. And he presents these issues to God.

[9 : 21] And then we have a break in the narrative. It seems very strange, but this family tree is given at this point. And I think it does answer some of the problems of the narrative. Because what it does is it roots Moses and Aaron in the family tree of Israel again.

He's not being heard by his people, but this gives him validation. This shows his pedigree. This shows that he belongs to the line of the people. The genealogy here is an unusual one.

It begins with the first two sons of Jacob, but it does not give a full genealogy of all the sons of Jacob. Nor does it give us the full details of the sons of Reuben and Simeon. It gives us their initial sons.

It doesn't trace their genealogy down the line. Its purpose rather seems to be to situate Levi, the tribe of Levi and his descendants, within the larger family of Jacob.

And once this has been done, the focus is purely upon Levi and nothing is said about the successive tribes. By listing the first two tribes, it also maybe raises the question of the firstborn status or the preeminent status within the nation of Israel.

[10 : 30] As we look through the story of Genesis, Exodus and Numbers, we can see that this is a key question. Which is the preeminent firstborn tribe? At certain points, it seems like Joseph.

Joseph gets the firstborn portion. Two portions. One for Ephraim, one for Manasseh. And all the other sons just get one portion. So in that sense, he is the firstborn.

Judah becomes the leader of the tribes. Reuben is the firstborn, but is disqualified because he slept with Bilhah. Simeon and Levi seem to be judged as a result of their actions in Shechem.

They're scattered among the people. But Levi seems to have some sort of redemption. Levi takes the place of the firstborn sons in the book of Numbers, representing the people as the firstborn son of Yahweh.

So the firstborn status of Israel seems to be in the background of this particular account. Another interesting detail here is that only three ages are given. The ages of Levi, Kohath and Amram.

[11 : 33] No other ages are given. Although we do have ages in the next chapter. The ages of Moses and Aaron. Amram and Levi both lived to 137 years.

Amram is the father of Aaron and Moses. And there might be some suggestion here that he is the archetypal Levite. He is the one that is the head of both the Levite who leads the Exodus, Moses, and also the Levite who leads to the high priesthood.

James Bajon has noted that there are 137 words in the first five commandments in the Ten Commandments. Perhaps there is some connection to be noted there.

He's also observed that there are 26 generations from Adam to Moses and Aaron. Jochebed is also the 26th name in the list. The names Yahweh and Kavod, which are both represented within the name Jochebed, both have a gematrial value of 26, the way that certain words have a numerical value in Hebrew and also in Greek.

Her name is the first name in scripture to have the divine name Yahweh as an element within it. A further interesting detail is that the second set of five commandments cover 26 words.

[12 : 51] And the fact that 26 is the gematrial value of the name of Yahweh makes it an especially important detail within scripture. There are questions that we could ask here about chronology.

We are told elsewhere that there are 430 years leading up to the Exodus. Now, we could date that from the time they first go down to Egypt, or, as some have suggested, it begins with the promise of Isaac's birth, and living under the hegemony of the Egyptians.

This is something that they do when they live in the land of the Philistines. The Philistines are associated with Egypt. And then, as they go down to Egypt, of course, that is continued. In chapter 15, verse 16, of the book of Genesis, we're told that they will come out in the fourth generation.

And Levi has four generations leading up to Aaron and Moses. So this seems to fulfil that particular promise that's made to Abram. It is interesting to note that there are a number of women mentioned within this genealogy.

Amram marries Jochebed, who's, again, the 26th person within the list. She's someone who is the first person to have the name of Yahweh included in her name in scripture, and she's the mother of Moses and Aaron.

[14 : 09] She's already been an actor within the story so far, but not named. Aaron marries Elishabah, and Elishabah is a daughter of Amminadab and a sister of Nashon.

She's from an important family within the tribe of Judah, the leading princely family. And for that reason, there seems to be some sort of relationship between the priestly and the royal lines here.

And then we hear that Eliezer marries one of the daughters of Putiel. All of these connections suggest that there is something about the priestly line that deserves a special attention.

The ages of the priestly line of Levi, Kohath, and Amram are given, and later Moses and Aaron. And then we see the names of their wives given. There's attention given to their pedigree and the relations that they have.

The final verses of the narrative resume by recalling Moses' objection that occurred just beforehand, but does not repeat the statement that he had concerning the people not listening to him.

[15 : 14] His pedigree has been established at this point. And there's something about this genealogy that I think helps to move the narrative forward. It connects the narrative with what has gone beforehand in the book of Genesis and elsewhere.

And it also moves it forward by bringing the tribe of Levi to the foreground of the narrative. Levi is going to be the tribe that really propels the actions of the Exodus.

It will be the firstborn tribe in that respect. They represent the firstborn of Israel, sacrificed to the Lord, dedicated to his service. A question to consider.

At various points in the book of Genesis, God changes people's names. But in the book of Exodus, the focus is upon God revealing his own name, something deeper about his identity.

He says that previously he's been known as God Most High by the patriarchs, but now he's being known by his true name, Yahweh. And the events of the Exodus will serve to reveal something more about who God is.

[16 : 18] God reveals his identity through history. And the purpose of the Exodus is perhaps above all else, a theological one, to reveal God's identity to his people and also to the Egyptians.

Can you identify some of the ways that God has already highlighted the importance of his identity within the narrative of Exodus so far?