

Bible Study #10 Exodus 6.1–30 02–18–2021

The Lord's answers did not specifically respond to Moses' questions, but rather reasserts that deliverance of his people is indeed his intention. The questions do not elicit a rebuke but a promise. The word 'now', with which the first answer commences, accentuates the truth that the timing of the rescue was God's prerogative. Moreover, the deliverance was not going to be in secret but worked out before their eyes.

Twice in this verse the power behind the deliverance is said to be by 'a mighty hand'. While the NIV inserts 'my mighty hand' on both occasions, other translators were clearly reticent to do so (cf. AV, RSV, NASB, ESV, NRSV). Because there has already been a reference to God's mighty hand (3:19), the first occurrence here would seem to be similarly a reference to His mighty hand.

The second occurrence is not so clear, as later on the same root in a verbal form is used of the pressure put on the Israelites to hurry and leave Egypt (12:33). Whatever the translation and interpretation here may be, the point is clear that the Lord was going to act upon Pharaoh so that Israel could go free ('what I will do to Pharaoh').

This verse (v/ 2) opens with the statement: 'God spoke to Moses and said to him'. Many translators have felt that some additional word is needed, and so the NIV and NRSV add 'God also said', while the NASB inserts 'further'. The declaration follows, 'I am the Lord', linking this passage with the explanation about His name that God gave to Moses at the burning bush (3:13-17).

This formula, from the time of Moses onward, often appears as though it was God's signature attached to a proclamation. Here it introduces the name itself (v. 3) and to indicate God's purpose for Israel (vs. 6-8), and then terminates the speech with finality (v. 8).

The declaration that followed concerned the transition in regard to God's name. Whereas previously in the patriarchal times, God made Himself known as El Shaddai, now He used a name that He had not employed previously. This statement has been widely discussed, and it is the basis by which many critical scholars distinguish various strands in the Pentateuch, dependent on whether they use the name 'elohim or yhwh.

But the contrast here is not between these two names, but between yhwh and 'el shadday (God Almighty). The problem is how to reconcile this statement with the fact that the name yhwh (the Lord) does appear many times in Genesis, and even the name of Moses' mother/grandmother, Jochebed, contains an abbreviated form of it (yh).

Several different explanations have been given to explain Exodus 6:3. One main line of argumentation is to focus on the use of the preposition 'by' and the significance of the verb 'know'. On this explanation, God had revealed Himself by the name yhwh, but the Israelites did not know the significance of the name until the time of Moses. The vocable was known but not its true meaning.

On the other hand, it has been claimed that there is a question here without the normal interrogative marker: 'Did I not make myself known to them?' While this argument is possible, yet the former viewpoint seems preferable. The patriarchs knew the name but did not understand the full import of it.

It was only when the exodus event was imminent that the people came to realize the true significance of the name yhwh. Giving God a new name at this juncture would have created suspicion. Moses had to confirm for his people that he was acting for the God of the patriarchs, not some unknown God.

The relation between God and his people was governed by a formal covenant. This was made initially with Abraham but re-affirmed to Isaac and Jacob. Central to that covenant was the promise concerning occupation

of the land of Canaan (cf. Gen. 15:18-21; 17:8; 28:13). It was a land about which they already knew a great deal, for they had already lived there.

Their occupancy of it was uncertain, as they were only sojourners there, residents without ownership rights. Now they were reminded that possession of the land was certain, as God was giving it to them as a gift. In the book of Deuteronomy the promise of land receives more detailed treatment, especially in chapter 26:1-11.

The cries of the Israelites had not gone unnoticed. God had heard the pleas of His enslaved people and remembered His covenant. This expression, to 'remember' on God's part, is an anthropomorphism. To say that He remembers His covenant is to assert that He faithfully fulfills its promised provisions. God does not forget. We need to be reminded of the certainty of God's promises.

In following verses (vs. 6-11), Moses is commanded by God in reference to the Israelites. He has to go again to them with a divine message. First, God identifies Himself as the Lord. Then He sets out His chosen ministry to Israel. The repeated 'I' emphasizes the role God has in salvation. It appears in this passage seven times.

The second sentence in verse 6 contains three words relating to redemption that form part of a cluster of terms associated with the exodus. First of all, it uses the verb 'to bring out' to describe the release from slavery and going out into the wilderness. Secondly, the verb 'to deliver' has already been used twice in the preceding narrative (3:8; 5:23) when reference is made to God's act of releasing Israel from slavery.

Thirdly, the verb 'to redeem' is introduced to convey the idea of purchase of the people by the Lord. The best-known use of this verb is in the book of Ruth in regard to Boaz' redemption of Ruth (Ruth 4:1-12). The harshness of life in Egypt for the Israelites is emphasized by stressing the heavy yoke that they carried, and the fact that they really were slaves. Deliverance was going to be redemption from the realm of sin and evil.

God's promise to Israel also involved the relationship between himself and the people. At Sinai the nation was to be given its constitutional charter, with its life regulated by its sovereign. He would adopt Israel as His children, while from the reciprocal point of view He would be their God.

This basic statement of God's relationship with Israel will be elaborated later. The events surrounding Israel's exodus from Egypt were intended to be proof that the Lord really was God, unlike the gods who were worshipped by the Egyptians.

The focus turns now (v. 8) to the gift of Canaan. Whereas verse 6 used the verb 'bring out' to speak of deliverance from Egypt, now the verb 'bring' is employed to speak of entry into the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The promise was made by an oath-taking ceremony that involved an uplifted hand (cf. Num. 14:30; Ezek. 20:5).

This land was to be God's gift to his people so that it would be their 'possession'. The word used here for 'possession' only occurs nine times in the Old Testament, seven of which are in Ezekiel. The verb, though, occurs over 230 times, especially in reference to Israel's taking possession of Canaan. The message to the Israelites of God's intentions concludes with another use of the self-identificatory formula, 'I am the LORD'.

Moses declared to the Israelites just what the Lord had told him, carrying out his role as covenantal mediator between God and His people. He was, however, rebuffed by the people who refused to listen to him. Two reasons are given why this happened. The first is because of their 'discouragement'. The Hebrew word comes from a root meaning 'to cut short' and it only appears here in the Bible.

It was rendered as 'faint-hearted' by the LXX, and this seems to fit well with the context and suggests they were 'short of spirit'. The second and related reason was because of their 'hard labor'. Bondage, plus hard labor, accentuated now by the absence of the provision of straw, brought about deep depression. A dispirited people was in no mood to accept what Moses told them.

The people were not the only ones to receive a message from the Lord. Moses had to go to Pharaoh and deliver to him a second message just like the one he had first received (5:1). The command to him was to release the Israelites and let them depart from Egypt.

Moses' response to the instruction was to express again doubts about his mission to Pharaoh. The reaction of his own people suggested a negative answer from Pharaoh. Why would he listen to someone who spoke with 'faltering lips'? (lit. 'uncircumcised lips'). This phrase is significant for it marks the development of the idea of circumcision to embrace the idea of what is unfit or undedicated to the Lord.

Similarly, Jeremiah applies the word 'uncircumcised' to hearing, saying 'uncircumcised ears' (Jer. 6:10). Moses' attitude to his own speaking ability had not changed from his earlier defensive statements. The answer to his question comes in 7:1-5, interrupted by an insertion regarding genealogies in 6:14-25.

The narrative is interrupted at this point by the insertion of a limited genealogy. It covers only Reuben, Simeon and Levi the two oldest sons of Jacob, that are cited as preliminary to the record of the tribe of Levi. The focus is on the families of Moses and Aaron, as leaders in the Israelite community. It will be shown that the brothers were fitted for their role because of their descent from Levi, father of the priestly family.

After giving the genealogy, reference is made to the fact that it was the very same Aaron and Moses mentioned in it that were the spokesmen for God. The information follows the listing in Genesis 46, giving the basic information about Reuben, the firstborn, and Simeon, the second born. Levi follows as the third son, but much additional information is given of his family.

Whereas the genealogy in Genesis 46 only lists Levi and three sons (i.e., first and second generations), here the genealogy of Levi is traced down to the fifth generation. Genealogies were always important to the Jewish people. We have a renewed interest in our genealogies today.

Most people consider them very boring readings. That is because most of the names are strange or unknown to us. Imagine, if you were reading a list of your ancestors, would it be boring? I think these lists tell us of the importance of each individual in God's heart and mind. Each of us is important to him. Your name and mine are unknown to most people, but our heavenly Father, the God of the Universes, knows us each by name.

There are surprising features in it, e.g. the number of women included – Jochebed, Elisheba, and an unnamed daughter of Putiel, plus the concentration on Aaron rather than Moses, and the marriage of Aaron to a woman from Judah. The choice of Moses rather than his older brother Aaron points to God's choice in action. The first-born is passed over as the leader in favor of his younger brother. God chooses as he wills.

The name Jochebed is significant, as it carries the abbreviated form of the covenantal name yh, showing that the name yhwh was in use prior to the events related in the book of Exodus. This means that Amram married his father's aunt, a marriage of relatives that was prohibited under the later biblical law (Lev. 18:12).

Another significant marriage is that of Aaron, who married Elisheba, child of Amminadab (v. 23). Rather than marrying a woman from the family of Levi, Aaron married a woman from Judah (see 1 Chron. 2:10).

This fact is significant in relation to the ancestry of Jesus, for the biblical genealogies show the names of Elisheba's father, Amminadab, and her brother, Nahshon, as links in the line from Judah, via David, to Christ (Ruth 4:18-22; 1 Chron. 2:10-11; Matt. 1:4; Luke 3:32-33). Here the priestly and the kingly are blended, foreshadowing the same combination in the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

The final verses in this section resume the narrative, drawing attention to the facts already stated earlier in verse 13 regarding Moses and Aaron, though with the reversal of the order of their names between verse 26

and verse 27. To the instruction regarding bringing the Israelites out of Egypt is added that they were to exit 'according to their divisions'.

The word for division or battalion is a term used in the Pentateuch several times to denote Israel as the people wandered in the desert (see Exod. 7:4; 12:41; Num. 10:14, 18, 22, 25). Later its most frequent usage (c. 200 times) is in the phrase 'the Lord of hosts'. The point here is that the Israelites were not going to depart from Egypt as mere slaves but as warriors in battle array, ready to initiate occupancy of Canaan.

Verse 27 confirms the identity of those designated to represent the Israelites before Pharaoh. No change had been made in regard to God's spokesmen; they were still the same Moses and Aaron. The switch in the order of the names points now to the fact that not birthright but God's choice who determines the leading figure.

Another episode is related here of a renewed commission for Moses. He was reluctant to take up the task, but proved obedient to the Lord's directions when told again that Aaron would be his 'prophet'. The narrative brings the reader up to the time when Moses again professed lack of the necessary gifts for this ministry. God had identified Himself as 'the Lord' (see comment on 3:13-15), and He now indicated that the whole content of His revelation to Moses was to be communicated to Pharaoh – 'everything I am telling you'.

Again, Moses returned to his own lack of oratorical gifts, citing once more his claim that he had 'faltering lips' (lit. 'uncircumcised lips,' see 6:12). His assertion was that if he were to go, then Pharaoh would refuse to listen to him.

Tomorrow we will continue studying Exodus 7:1–13.