



THE BOOK OF EXODUS

LESSON 6– STUDY QUESTIONS EXODUS 6:2-13, 29-30; 7:1-5

DAY ONE

1. What thoughts from the reflection and/or commentary stayed with you and helped you on your spiritual journey this week?

Read Exodus 6:2-4

2a. Again Moses is in God's presence. What does God say to him in verse 2?

b. At the burning bush God revealed another name to Moses. What was it? See Exodus 3:14.

NOTE: The name God gave to Moses at the burning bush is YAHWEH (YHWH) in Hebrew. Because the Jews believed that this name was too sacred to be spoken or written, "the Lord" (El Shaddai) was often substituted for it.

3. According to verse 3, to whom did God appear at an earlier time and what did God keep hidden from these men?

4a. God tells Moses He established a covenant with his ancestors Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. What is the dictionary definition of a covenant?

b. Read Genesis 17: 7-8 and describe the covenant.

5a. Read Exodus 2: 24-25. How does this verse connect with today's passage?

b. God describes the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. What was that covenant, according to verse 4?

6. CONNECTION: In this passage God reminds Moses of the covenant He made with Moses' ancestors. The Bible is a story of covenants between God and man. Eucharistic Prayer IV states this in prayer form: "Father....You formed man in your own likeness and set him over the whole world...Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship you did not abandon him to the power of death. . . Again and again you offered a covenant to man and...in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Savior." Have you ever entered into any kind of a covenant with God? If so, how do you see yourself fulfilling this covenant?

Read and record Luke 22:20. Every time we participate in the sacrament of Eucharist, we are partakers in that new covenant. Let the thought of that awesome gift lead you into prayer.

DAY TWO

Read Exodus 6:5-6

7. God continues to speak to Moses in verse 5. The word "remember" is used in regards to God. Look at the various definitions of the word "remember" in a dictionary. What definition, if any, helps you better understand how God is "remembering His covenant with the Israelites?

8. Because Moses is a descendant of Abraham, he is an heir of God's promises to the patriarchs. How does that fact connect with today's passage?

9a. In verse 6 of today's passage, God again reveals His name to Moses. How does God refer to Himself? List the things God promises to do for His people.

10a Verse 6 uses the phrase "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm." This is the first reference in the Bible to the term redeem. Look up and record the dictionary definition of redeem.

b. Rewrite the phrase above with that definition in mind using your own words.

11. CONNECTION: Today's passage speaks of God's continuing faithfulness demonstrated by His desire to free the Israelites from the burdens the Egyptians have laid on them, to deliver them from slavery and to redeem them with an outstretched arm. From what burdens do you

want God to free you? From what do you wish God to deliver you? From what do you need God to redeem you? List these here as prayer petitions and the reasons for your requests.

Read Matthew 11:28-30. (Good memory verses) Record the verse(s) that you find most comforting. Let those thoughts lead you into prayer

DAY THREE

Read Exodus 6:7-9

12a. Whenever Scripture records God speaking to the Israelites (God's people), we know the words are spoken to us as well – we are God's people. Today, in the first sentence of verse 7, we read some of the most comforting words of the Bible. Record them here.

b. What does God say His people will know in the second sentence of verse 7?

13. In the remainder of verse 7 God goes on to tell the people something about themselves and something about Himself. Record His words.

14a. What promises does God make in verse 8?

b. Again God reveals His name. Record it here.

15. God has made many promises in the Old Testament. Read the following passages and record the promise.

- Leviticus 26:12
- Jeremiah 31:33 (second half)
- Hosea 2:19-20.

16. Moses revealed the promises of God to the people, "but they would not listen." What do you think that means?

17a. What are the reasons the author gives according to verse 9?

b. Why might this prevent God's people from listening to Moses?

18. CONNECTION: The solemn vows that God speaks to Moses are words of divine love and commitment whereby God for the first time takes the Jews as His “chosen people”. Much as in marriage vows God seals His sacred covenant with the words: “I will take you as my people and I will be your God.” You too are a beneficiary of this awesome promise. Are you able to feel God’s personal commitment to you? Describe a time when you realized the reality of God’s covenant with you?

Read Isaiah 43:1. Record the words God spoke to Israel and let these words speak to you.

DAY FOUR
Read Exodus 6:10-13

19. Now the Lord, once again, sends Moses to Pharaoh. What message is Moses to take?

20a. Moses is quick to offer his excuses to the Lord. In verse 12 what reasons does he give for assuming Pharaoh would not listen to him?

b. God, in his infinite patience, has already reassured Moses. Go back to Exodus 4:12 to find out how the Lord will help Moses. Record the ways here.

21a. In verse 13 of today’s passage what orders did God give to Moses and Aaron?

b. The author uses the word “charging.” What does the word “charge” mean to you in this context? (If you are not sure, see a dictionary for the multiple meanings of this word, and choose one that seems appropriate here.)

22. CONNECTION: We are all familiar with the “African American spiritual” entitled “Let my people go!” These words of God to Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron set up the confrontation that is to come between God and Pharaoh. They also represent a cry through the ages for release from bondage of all sorts. For the slaves in the American South it was freedom from slavery. For sinners the words represent the cry for release from enslavement to sin; for those subjugated by injustice, the cry for freedom and justice. What do these words call to mind for you?

Read and record Psalm 146:5-7. Let these thoughts lead you into a prayer of thanksgiving.

DAY FIVE

Read Exodus 6:29-30

NOTE: Our study of Exodus skips verses 14-28 of Ch. 6, which contain the genealogy of Moses. Some say that this section was included to distinguish Moses from other Egyptians with that name. Commentators Ponessa and Manhardt believe that the biblical author wants to show Moses' qualifications for the job instead of going right to the solution to the problem. He wants to "find the solution, not just in external miracles, but in the fact of who we are, created by God. God's remedy is Moses himself, and not just his deeds." "(Moses and the Torah" by Ponessa & Manhardt, pg. 30)

23a, In verse 29, God speaks to Moses. We would all do well to stop and remember that God is speaking to us all the time – the problem is that most of the time we are not listening, because our hearts and lives are so busy. Read Psalm 46:10 and record its first sentence here:

24a. In verse 29, God reminds Moses of a truth. What is it?

b. What does the Lord direct Moses to tell Pharaoh, according to the end of verse 29?

25. Instead of focusing on the wonderful truth referred to in question 24, what does Moses think about when the Lord tells him to speak to Pharaoh, according to verse 30?

26a. Understandably, Moses is still afraid and questioning. Read the following references. They speak of two other prophets of God. How did each of them react to God's call? Record their actions here:

Jeremiah 1:6

Jonah 1:1-3

27. If you were to clump these three men together (Moses, Jeremiah and Jonah), and come up with a description of how they acted as a group, how would you describe them?

28. CONNECTION; We all have times in our lives when God calls us to speak and we feel inadequate for the job. Rather than worrying about how we will look to others, this passage helps us realize that we are only the mouthpieces that are simply to convey the love or truth of God. Think of an example in your own life where God asked you to speak His message out loud to another person or persons. How did you respond?

Read and record Romans 9:20. God has made you and He can use you as an instrument just as you are. Let those thoughts lead you into prayer.

DAY SIX

Read Exodus 7:1-5

29. The Lord is not put off by Moses' lack of self-confidence. What does God reveal to Moses about himself and his brother Aaron (verse 1)?

30a. God continues giving directions to Moses. What does God tell him to do in verse 2?

b. What duty does God give to Aaron?

31a. The Lord prepared Moses and Aaron for the fact that Pharaoh would not receive them well. What phrase from verse 3 indicates this?

NOTE: At this point you may be puzzling, why would God harden Pharaoh's heart and then punish him for it? Following is an excerpt that may help to answer this question. [The Exodus Experience by Maureen Fritz] "Created as persons of free will, people possess the power to choose between good and evil. If a person consistently chooses evil, that person becomes fixed or hardened in a position of no return. When this happens, we may say that God has stiffened or hardened that person's heart, meaning that God allowed the hardening of that person's heart. On the other hand, 'God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart' may be a literary way of dealing with what is beyond human comprehension..."

b. God continues in verse 3 to reveal a part of His plan for the deliverance of His people. What are God's words?

32a. God's earlier indication, that Pharaoh's heart would be hardened, is confirmed in verse 4. Record the words that tell us this.

b. In spite of this obstinacy God promises Moses that He will deliver the Israelites. Record His words of assurance.

33. How would you explain what is meant by God's "great acts of judgment"?

34a. God continues to reveal His plan, and, also, to build Moses' confidence. With regards to the Egyptians, what words does God use when He speaks of delivering the Israelites (verse 5)?

35. CONNECTION: Sometimes, in the midst of our difficulties, it looks like God isn't showing up, when actually the struggle is designed to give us the time and skills to develop into what we are supposed to be in His plan. God has a plan for each of our lives. Yet He seldom reveals His complete plan to us in advance. What if God had answered each and every one of your prayers immediately and explicitly? Describe a time when He didn't and it turned out to be a very good thing!

Read and record Jeremiah 29:11. Today, begin your prayer thanking God that He doesn't always answer your prayers exactly when and how you ask.



THE BOOK OF EXODUS

LESSON 6– COMMENTARY
By Rev. Paul J. Niemann, D. Min.
Exodus 6:2-13, 29-30; 7:1-5

Exodus 6:2-4

Our lesson begins with another version of the call of Moses. You may recall that the entire Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) are not the work of a single author, but are the blending together of more ancient written documents and oral traditions. This account of the call of Moses is from the “Priestly” tradition. Its main themes are the revelation of the divine Name and the unique status of Israel as people of the covenant. Indeed, these two concepts are really one and the same. To know God’s Name is to know God; to know God is not merely to have an intellectual idea of God, but to be intimate with God.¹ To know the Name of God is to be in a covenant relationship; to “call upon the Name” is to remind God of the covenant; pronouncing the Name is a way of affirming the entire covenant. Israel is unique among all nations, for they know God’s Name; when Israel fails to keep the covenant, the prophets accuse them of profaning the holy Name [Ezekiel 36:18-28].

As though in response to Moses’ prayer and lament in the previous chapter, God speaks to Moses and says: “I am the LORD [YHWH]. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty,² but by my name ‘The LORD’ I did not make myself known to them.”

Each time one of the patriarchs encountered God; God revealed himself as the God of Abraham (and Isaac) and so affirmed the continuity of the covenant. This is also recalled for Moses: “I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens.” There is indeed only one, universal and sovereign God who makes covenant with chosen persons or families, but each covenant is a deeper or more complete revelation, symbolized by the Name by which the Deity is made known.

The Yahwistic tradition tells us that Enosh, the grandson of Adam, was the first man to invoke the name of the LORD (YHWH) [Genesis 4:26], and that the name of YHWH was invoked by Abraham [Genesis 15:1, 7], Isaac [Genesis 26:25] and Jacob [Genesis 28:10-21].

¹ Compare the traditional biblical expression for marital relations: “the man knew his wife” [Genesis 4:1].

² In Hebrew, this name is *El Shaddai*, usually translated as “God Almighty.” This is based on the Greek Old Testament (the *Septuagint*) which rendered *Shaddai* as *pantokrator*; “ruler of all things.” Many scholars believe *Shaddai* to mean “the mountain;” not an earthly peak but the mythological “home of the gods” (as the ancient Greeks thought of Mount Olympus). *El* is the basic Hebrew word for “God” and occurs also in the forms *Elohim* (literally, Gods) and *Eloah*, similar to the Arabic divine name *Allah*.

So why does Exodus insist that it is only in the time of Moses that the holy Name YHWH is made known? Because now God will be known, not just as some far off Deity who may be called by a name or title derived from tribal tradition, but directly, personally, in what is about to be done for the Israelites. YHWH is other people had other gods. Thus, YHWH was “one among many.” Exodus will show the Israelites that YHWH is the greatest of all gods [Psalms 95, 96], certainly more powerful than the gods of Egypt, awesome in their magnificent temples and with their elaborate rites of worship. The God of Israel has authority over the deities of every nation and place.

The later prophets of Israel will insist that there is indeed only one God, and what other nations worship is nothingness [Isaiah 44:6-20; 45:14-18].

Exodus 6:5-6

These verses repeat what was written in 2:23-25: God is indeed present to the people in their oppression. God hears their lament and remembers the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The concept of remembering or remembrance in the Hebrew Bible is much more dynamic than can easily be expressed in English. For us, remembering is often a mental activity, often limited to recalling the practical details of daily living. People who can accurately recall names, phone numbers, or other facts are described as having a good memory.

For the Hebrews, to remember (*zakar*) is to relive an event that occurred in the past in such a way that the event becomes present. Whether the original experience was good or bad, remembering gives the event fresh energy and importance. As long as there is this kind of memory, life has meaning, the ancestors long dead are still with us, God’s deeds of power are also for us today. On a less positive note, grudges and crimes from centuries ago may break out into arguments and wars at any moment. Remembering means that all that was past is present, and promises to be in the future.³

God’s remembrance of the covenant signals that this covenant still binds him to his people. God’s active remembering also makes the covenant more than an historical fact. God’s covenant is about to be renewed in a more powerful way with his people.

God therefore remembers and also promises: “I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.”

³ This present-and-future sense is also conveyed in the divine Name, YHWH, as noted earlier.

In Jewish tradition, the four verbs; I will free you ... deliver you ... redeem you ... and take you [6:7] are symbolized by the four cups of wine which are drunk during the Passover Seder meal. This meal is a *zikkaron* (a memorial feast, a celebration of remembrance, from the verb *zakar*) in which today's participants are present to God's act of redemption and liberation.

Christians also celebrate this kind of divine remembering in the Eucharist, in which Jesus commands us to eat his flesh and drink his blood in the form of bread and wine, and to do so in remembrance of him, as his *zikkaron*.

Exodus 6:7-9

"I will take you as my people, and I will be your God." God's faithfulness to his covenant, the deeper meaning of his Name, will be revealed in two ways. First, in the miraculous liberation of the people from Egypt: "You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians." Second, in restoring to the people Abraham's promised land: "I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am YHWH."

In this we see that the divine promise is not just about getting out of a tough situation. In more theological language, God's redemption is not only about getting rid of our sinfulness. God calls people to new life.

So also for us Christians. For too long we have thought of baptism as (only) the washing away of original sin. Baptism is indeed that, but it also a new relationship with God. We are called to live in communion with God. So we are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the holy Trinity, and destined to share the fullness of life in the midst of that divine community. What saintly writers have described as mystical union with God is meant for every baptized person. In other words, as Vatican II reminded us, every Christian person is called to holiness. We are all meant to be saints.

If we Christians sometimes struggle with the good news of God's infinite love for us and his desire to be one with us, we can understand that the Israelites ... would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery. Egypt's oppression of Israel succeeded in wounding or diminishing their humanity, convincing them that they were unworthy of God's promises, unable to receive the gift of life and freedom which God was offering them. Both Israel and Egypt will need to be convinced of the reality of God's message.

Exodus 6:10-13

It is difficult enough to believe that the LORD would ask us to do something in his name, or by his authority. Our first reaction may well be disbelief, doubt, fear, or unworthiness. When we finally accept the Lord's command, and try to act upon the word, we may encounter disbelief, skepticism, even ridicule from others, especially those closest to us [Jeremiah 1:4-10 and 20:7-

18; Matthew 10:34-36; Mark 3:20-22 and 6:1-6]. We are ready to give up entirely. So it was with Moses. At the moment of his failure to convince the people of Israel, he is commanded by God to do what is even less imaginable: "Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his land." And Moses responds to God as we might expect: "The Israelites have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me, poor speaker that I am?" Moses repeats the same disqualification as in 4:10.

The last verse of today's section summarizes this version of the story of the call of Moses: "Thus the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them orders regarding the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, charging them to free the Israelites from the land of Egypt." Again and again we will be told that the miracle of the Exodus is God's initiative and responsibility. Human beings have only to obey. At the same time, God chooses to save his people only with their participation and cooperation. The Lord has spoken, and given orders, but Moses and Aaron must lead the people to freedom.

At this point, the Priestly author inserts the genealogy of Moses [6:14-28]. Such family lists are generally not appreciated by Christian readers and are usually omitted from the Lectionary and the Liturgy of the Hours. Genealogy is important in the Bible because it states clearly who is included in the covenant people [and deserving of trust and respect] and who are outsiders. Some genealogies remind Israel not to be too clannish and exclusive. Current enemies may actually be distant relatives, and some of the great men and women of Israel had ancestors who were not "pure Israelites," for example, David, whose great-grandmother was Ruth, a woman of Moab.

Exodus 6:29-30

Today's verses repeat the story of Moses' commissioning in 6:10-12. The command of the Lord and Moses' protest: [The Lord] said to [Moses], "I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I am speaking to you." But Moses said in the LORD's presence, "Since I am a poor speaker, why would Pharaoh listen to me?" Here is the essence of prophecy, as the Bible understands it: God chooses someone to speak for him, with divine authority. Human qualifications are irrelevant.

A prophet has a challenging vocation. No wonder it is often accepted reluctantly, as in the case of Jeremiah and Jonah. The prophet is first of all a person who listens carefully to the word of God [Isaiah 50:4-6; Jeremiah 20:9; Ezekiel 2:1-3:4; Amos 7:12-16]. This word is frequently a call to repentance, a summons to renew the ancient covenant, and so is usually unpopular.

Most people think of prophecy as prognostication, foretelling the future. Biblical prophecy is actually quite conservative, urging people to get rid of religious innovations (especially compromises with foreign religions) and return to the old, simple ways of the Torah. What the prophet "foretells" is the fulfillment of God's promises: life and prosperity for those who are

faithful to God's word, but punishment, exile, and destruction for those who abandon the covenant.

The credentials of the prophet are not in the prophet's eloquence or status. It is when the prophet is "proved true," often after his death, that his words are collected and preserved for future generations as a testimony to the ongoing faithfulness of God. See Jeremiah, chapters 26 through 28, especially 28:1-17, for a good description of the prophet's ministry.

Here Moses is being sent as the great prophet for the Israelites: God will use even the weakness of Moses' speech to make his word known to his people Israel and to the Egyptians.

Exodus 7:1-5

Apparently due to Moses' reluctance, the LORD appoints Moses' elder brother Aaron to fulfill the prophetic task. God's word cannot be stopped by human hesitation. The divine authority will rest with Moses, but Aaron will be the speaker: "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land."

The deeper significance of this message is the establishment of Aaron in a prophetic role, as interpreter of the word entrusted to Moses. Later, when Aaron is ordained a priest of the Sinai covenant, his responsibilities will include a ministry of interpretation of the divine law, including judgment on offenders. This ministry will remain with the Israelite priesthood as long as it exists [Ezra 2:63; Jeremiah 18:18; Haggai 2:11-13; Matthew 8:4; Mark 15:1, John 11:47-52; Acts 9:1-2].

The word of God is powerful and irrevocable, but the human will is free to resist. Using a powerful image, God promises Moses that he will harden Pharaoh's heart. Nahum Sarna, in his book, Exploring Exodus, discusses this image quite thoroughly:

Generally in the Bible, physical sensations are expressed in terms of the actions of the specific part of the body with which they are believed to be associated. Thus, bowels were thought to be the seat of strong emotions... In like manner, the elegist who laments the fall of Jerusalem in the Book of Lamentations [2:11] can proclaim that his 'liver spills on the ground' over the ruin of his people. When the psalmist confesses that his kidneys afflict him [Psalm 16:7], he is suffering the torments of conscience; So it is that the heart (Hebrew *lev[av]*) only rarely in the Bible refers to the physical organ as such. Mostly it is as the vital principle, the controlling center of human actions, the seat of inner life, that "heart" is used. ... The state of the heart defines, then, the essential character of a person. Its 'hardening' connotes the willful suppression of the capacity for reflection, for self-examination, for unbiased judgments about good and evil. In short, the 'hardening of the heart' becomes synonymous with the numbing of the soul, a condition of moral atrophy. ... In brief, the idea of God's hardening the pharaoh's heart is that He utilizes a man's natural proclivity to evil; He accentuates the process in furtherance of His own historical purposes [pp. 63-65].

Moreover, God promises to "multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt." In this way the authenticity of the words of Moses and Aaron will be manifest. Pharaoh's resistance will

only provide the backdrop for God's sovereignty: "When Pharaoh does not listen to you, I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring my people the Israelites, company by company, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment."

This unprecedented display of power will also lead to conversion, even to worship on the part of the Egyptians: "The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD." They will "know" God even as the Israelites do, and we have a seed of hope for a covenant that will embrace all people everywhere [Isaiah 19: 19-25; Acts 2:10].