

Moses & Exodus

I want to read from Hebrews 11:23-26:

By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

This is quite a commentary on Exodus 1 to 18. If we were to read Exodus 1 to 18 without reading this passage, we might not interpret it in that way. In fact, many, many critical scholars certainly do not. "He was not an ordinary child ... they were not afraid of the king's edict ... he refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter ... he chose to be mistreated ... he was looking ahead to his reward ... he regarded disgrace for Christ of greater value." It is interesting that in the Book of Hebrews, Moses sounds like a New Testament man. That is the way the New Testament tells us to look at Moses as we see him in the Old Testament context. Today we will look at some of the specific elements of Moses and the revelation in Exodus 1 to 18. Let us pray.

*God, our Father, give us eyes of faith, minds that understand, and hearts that are illumined and encouraged as we read Your Scriptures and the way You have called, used, and given insight to one of Your servants who stands so centrally in the Old Testament revelation. God, bless us here together. Be with those who aren't with us. Sustain them. Thank You for the health that you give us. Continue to use us in Your service, no matter how we are involved. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

I want to begin with five ways that the Book of Exodus is connected to the Book of Genesis. Many critical scholars deny that there is a real connection between Genesis and Exodus. Speaking generally, some of the critical schools of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries claimed that Moses came after the prophets and that Genesis came after Moses, in terms of the dates that these books were written. If that were indeed the order in which the material was written, then one would have to read the prophets first because they were the men who laid the groundwork for people to develop or even invent the entire early history of Israel and the exodus. According to this theory, they wanted to tell a story of the origin of the people of Israel, so they took a few oral traditions and wove together the beautiful patriarchal stories. Then some of the priests added Genesis 1-11 to the beginning. These critical scholars turned the Old Testament completely around. A man like Walter Eichrodt, for example, who is often considered a neo-conservative or a new liberal or neo-orthodox man, advances this theory in his two-volume biblical theology. Eichrodt's work contains many great insights and good exegesis, and I have learned a lot from him, but he believes that the revelation begins in Exodus and that Genesis 1-50 was added as a prologue later on. Eichrodt's book illustrates the critical denial of a living connection between Genesis and Exodus.

By contrast, I want to explain that in order to understand Exodus, you must understand Genesis because Genesis is not just a prologue. As we have seen, Genesis gives us the creational setting, the reestablishment of that through Noah, and the way that God covenanted with His people as illustrated by His dealings with the patriarchs. I want to point particularly to five material, theological connections between Genesis and Exodus.

First, there is the phrase “the God of the fathers” in Exodus 3 when God speaks to Moses. In Exodus 3:6, God tells Moses, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” Then in Exodus 3:13, Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me.’ He is afraid they won’t believe him, so in verse 15, we read, “God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, the LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.” We see the same reference to the God of the fathers in Exodus 4:5 and Exodus 6:3. The same God who spoke to the fathers is telling Moses to speak to the children of those fathers.

Secondly, there is reference to the seed. I read in Exodus 1:6, “Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous.” This verse tells us not only that the creation mandate—“be fruitful and multiply”—was being fulfilled, but also that God was fulfilling the promise He had given to Abraham concerning a numerous seed. When Abraham was wondering if he would ever have a child, God had told him that his offspring would be as numerous as the sand of the sea and the stars in the sky. Now we read that that promise concerning the seed was fulfilled while the people were in Egypt. God had brought Jacob with his 70 offspring into Egypt, and in Egypt God multiplied his people within the protection of one of the mightiest nations on earth in that day. In God’s use of Egypt in this way, we see how God is the Lord of creation. The Lord of the nations brought his people to Egypt and there He guided and directed them to fulfill the promise that He had given concerning the numerous seed. They were so exceedingly fruitful that the land of Egypt was filled with them. There were Israelites everywhere.

The third connection between Genesis and Exodus is what I call the “word and deed” reference. This is not a direct reference to a specific verse, but I have told you before that when God spoke, God acted. This pattern continues through the Book of Exodus. God heard, God remembered, God saw, God knew, God spoke, and God did. Every event we read about in Exodus 1-18 is preceded by a word. The word precedes the event. It is not, as the critics say, that God’s deed came first and then the people reflected on it and made up the word as if it had come before the deed. It angers me that these critics portray the biblical writers as deceivers. In reality, God spoke and then God acted. He always introduced His deed with His Word. He did not deal with the people and then let them think about it and try to come up with a meaning for themselves. That is the critical approach to interpreting the Scriptures. We have quite a different biblical theology, because we believe God spoke first and then acted.

God spoke to Moses and Moses obeyed. Keep this in mind as we go through the Scriptures. When Israel did something that God had not told them to, that is when they ran into trouble. The word comes, but the word that precedes the deed always calls for obedience and expectation. Again, it depends on one’s idea of God. Can you really trust in God to be a faithful God? Is He truly a Father in the respect that when He speaks, you can say “so it will be”? What assurance do you have in prayer? We live too often as if God *might* be with us, rather than being confident that He *will* be with us. To those of you who are parents, let me say to you as a father of eight and grandfather of 26, my words are carefully listened to. When I didn’t remember what I had promised, there were quite often eight voices to remind me in a hurry that I had said something and not done it. If you want to inspire faithfulness, you must do what you say.

I want to look at two terms from Exodus 2. “And God heard”—from *shama*, “to hear,”—“and God remembered,” and then in the next verse, “and God saw and God knew”—from *yada*, “to know.” Now the context of these verbs is that the king of Egypt had died and a new king had taken over. The Israelites were enslaved and their burdens increased and their groaning went up from their slavery. God’s people were called to be a blessing to the nations, and when they came to Egypt, the presence of God came with them. As they groaned, God was listening and as God was listening to the groaning, God

remembered. Now *zakar*, the verb for “to remember,” can mean that someone had forgotten something and then remembered it. That is not the sense we have here. God had not forgotten His covenant, but *zakar* can also be used in a situation like this, where God who had continued to uphold His covenant now wanted to carry out more fully the promises He had made. His promises were being carried out because Israel was multiplying and He was protecting them and then He was making them into a great nation. When God heard their groaning, He said, “Now the people are ready for Me to proceed.” God had not forgotten His people. God both heard them and saw them. He knew the misery of these people. He knew the hardships they were enduring. God saw and He said to Himself, “I know what to do with these people. I have given My word. They have My promises. I will fulfill the promise I made to be a God to them.” God remembered and He knew what He had said; He had said, “I will be with you.” The principle of Emmanuel—“God with us”—continues to reappear in the Scriptures. God had also said, “I will bless you,” and the word *barak*, as we saw before, not only means “to prosper you,” but also “to bring you life in its fullness and to save you.” God had also promised, “I will make of you a great nation.” These were the things that God remembered, that God knew it was time to carry out. God was proving Himself faithful.

Finally, I want to show the connection of the seed line and point out how central it is—not the land or some of the other things that you may think of as being very, very important. God said, “Look, I have to get these people circumcised.” Very likely, they were not being circumcised in Egypt. We know they were not circumcised in the desert. Before they could occupy the land, in Joshua 5, they had to be circumcised. God was concerned much more with the seed than He was with the land. He was concerned with the seed and the people whom He later calls *ami*, “My people.” The seed were His. He is concerned with people, with His nation whom He had been preparing to bring forth as His servant.

So we have these five specific material factors that inseparably relate Exodus to Genesis. Genesis is more than a prologue. Genesis is the first chapter. Exodus is the second. Now what is God’s method for remembering His covenant, for knowing that He had made promises, for hearing and seeing His people in bondage? What is His method? He calls a man. Again we see the principle of election, the one to serve on behalf of the many. He calls a man from the tribe of Levi. Jacob had said that the royal one would come from Judah, but Israel was not yet ready for a king. Israel was to become a priestly nation, and the Levites were to be chosen for that service, so the man God chose was from the tribe of Levi.

Now Moses’ life circumstances are well known. Moses’ birth was not unusual at all. He was a healthy baby. His father and mother were properly married. He had a brother Aaron, and a sister, Miriam. The king’s edict came through and Moses was to be destroyed. That part is unusual, but the birth itself is not at all unusual. The king of Egypt had demanded that all boy babies be killed, which makes Moses’ preservation so miraculous. He was miraculously preserved by caring parents, and God providentially brought the princess to bathe in the river. Thus Moses was introduced to the palace. Moses’ life was fairly unusual—that miraculous preservation and then that unusual preparation in the palace and in the desert. Moses spent 40 years in the palace, learning all about the culture, the language, military procedures. Then he spent 40 years in the desert. God used Moses’ foolishness, too. When he rose up to kill a man—Moses wanted to be a deliverer in his own right—God used it to bring him to a desert, because that is where he was going to spend 40 more years leading the people. It is amazing how God’s providence always comes through, and Moses was prepared. I wonder if he sometimes became impatient thinking, “If I am going to become someone important, what am I doing here following sheep through the desert?”

I can remember saying I was going to be a minister when I was a six years old. When I was 15, my father was knocked down. A young man in our congregation was working in a lumber yard and lost

control of a truckload of lumber. My father was trying to get out of the way and he slipped, so the seven tons of lumber smashed his foot right in his shoe. They had to cut his shoe off. Dad couldn't walk for a couple of years. He did recover, though, and when he was 94 years old, it was amazing—he walked like he had never had a smashed foot. The point of the story is that God used that smashed foot to take me out of school when I was 15. We lived on a farm and Dad could not afford to have a full-time hired man. I was big and strong and he said to me, "Son, if you want to go and study for the ministry, we'll have to just sell the cows and get rid of the farm and see how God will take care of us. But if you will postpone your education for a few years, then I think we can make it. And you will have to become the leading farmer." I had good big hands, and that's what I did.

I didn't get back to school until I was 27, because I had to go into the army during the Second World War. I will never forget how impatient I would get about being a minister sometimes when I was sitting there milking cows (before the days of milk machines), picking tomatoes, pitching watermelons, cutting and thrashing beans out there in the bean field. When I went into the army, I found out how God was indeed well in control. That experience of having to control 100 workers during the tomato, almond and melon harvest was a wonderful preparation. I tend to be an impatient person who wants to get in there and start doing things, but God said, "Slow down, George, slow down. I have things for you to do." I used to sit in that valley, looking at the foothills to the east and the high mountains that seemed to keep me from going where I wanted. I thought, "Will I ever get out of this valley?" I did. I got the South Pacific, to Japan, spent a few days in Korea, and after that I went to Canada for my pastoral internship. God is in charge. I want to give you that testimony. Some of you may be a little bit older. I was 34 before I became a minister. I was almost 50 before I got my Ph.D. God uses us in unusual circumstances. Don't forget that and don't become impatient when you have to sit here and struggle through books.

God gives revelation through various means. One way He gave revelation to Moses was by means of a theophany. God Himself appeared in the burning bush. Vos deals with the various means of God's revelation, and I want to quickly remind you what to look for. God spoke directly to Moses. Not only did He reveal Himself in theophany, but by speaking directly to Moses. He also spoke through Moses' mouth and by means of Moses' hand: "Raise that hand, Moses, and strike." And God revealed Himself as the sovereign Lord, for the plagues came in this way. God revealed Himself by the pillar of fire and the cloud that gave shade. You read about that in Numbers 10—it was the LORD who went before them and He made Himself known by the pillar and by the cloud. The angel of the LORD comes through in the theophany and in other ways as well.

An important way that God reveals Himself is through the giving of His name. We see this in Exodus 3:4, where God tells Moses His name—"I am that I am," or "I am who I will be." This name probably means, "I am the faithful one. I am Yahweh. I am the covenant keeping God. The faithful one, that is My name." If *Elohim* was more or less God's essential reference, *Yahweh* becomes His basic revelation. He who is God is Yahweh. He will always be what He said He is and He will never be anything but what He is. He keeps covenant. He keeps promises. He remains sovereign. The text of Exodus 3:14 and 6:3 indicates that Abraham never got to know God in the same "Yahweh" way that Moses did. Oh yes, Abram saw God as faithful, but did he see God bringing in a numerous seed? When Abraham died, he had only Isaac. Did Abraham see God bringing those people into a land? No. Did Abraham see the people being a powerful good among the nations? No, but Israel did. Moses did. And in that way—in an experiential, realistic, loving way—the people in Moses' day got to know the name Yahweh and what it meant in reality and in daily life.

Then we also have reference to the face of God, the presence of God. God makes Himself known through His presence. We read of that particularly in Exodus 32-34, but also in chapter 19 when the children of Israel did not want to come into the very presence of God because He was so awesome.

Now I want to move on to a discussion of Moses as mediator. Moses must be seen as the mediator of the Old Testament covenant. Abraham was a mediator, but Moses more fully, more completely than anyone else is the mediator of the Old Testament. The prophets became mediators. David became the mediator. Aaron and the other priests were mediators carrying out their functions through their various appointed offices, but Moses is the mediator par excellence standing between God and His people, between God and the nations, between God and the whole of creation. Moses stands high and tall in the Old Testament, and because that is true, I can understand why people who don't want to accept the supernaturalism of the Bible dismiss him as a mythical or legendary figure. Moses was God's agent in the beginning of Israel's existence as a nation. He was a mediator for Israel. He stood between God and the *ami*—"my people." Because God had set His eye, His heart, His whole mind on Israel, the descendants of Abraham, to be His means of working among the nations, He had a special relationship—a covenant bond—with them.

Thus Moses became the covenant mediator between God and the people. If God had anything to say, He said it through Moses; we read that in Numbers 11. In order to serve as a divinely appointed mediator for Israel, he had to stand before Pharaoh too. The promise had been to Abraham that his seed would stand before kings. Moses found out what it was like to stand before Pharaoh and to tell Pharaoh, "God says let *ami*, my people, go. Let them go worship. Let them go." There is the king, the sovereign, and there is that runaway fugitive-turned-shepherd standing now in front of the king. "Let those people go." God did not speak directly to Pharaoh; He did not come to Pharaoh in a dream or in a vision, but Moses' mouth became God's mouth. Aaron became Moses' mouth initially, because Moses said, "I can't talk," but that was only in the initial stages of the mission. Moses was given a helper when he said that he had problems speaking. "No, I can take care of that," says God. "You have an older brother," and the older brother had to serve as a speaker or translator for the younger, but the point is that they stood there in front of Pharaoh. Pharaoh lied, Pharaoh's heart was hardened—the verb is *kavad*. That verb that we have there can be used in a passive or a reflexive way as well as in an active way. Interestingly, the Bible says in some passages that God hardened Pharaoh as Moses dealt with him and then it says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. At one time it says God is doing it and then it says that Pharaoh does it again. This shows interaction even between a sovereign God and a recalcitrant king. God did not force him to be hard. God placed him in a situation in which he could respond and he responded by hardening his heart. Even this, however, was from the Lord, for we read in Romans 9 that God hardened Pharaoh that the glory of God might be enhanced. God was at work. But He never said to Pharaoh outright, "Don't do it." Pharaoh was confronted with honest, direct, well-meant commands—"Let my people go."

Then in connection with the tenth plague, Moses had to serve as the mediator of the Passover. The angel of the LORD came, but again it was Moses who stood between God and the people. It was Moses who had to give all the instructions concerning the Passover, but Moses could not himself become the mediatorial lamb. The Bible says that the sacrifice was a little goat or a little sheep. Moses could not in that sense become the mediatorial sacrifice, but he mediated and directed. He gave clear-cut commands and told these people exactly what to do and he became the man who instituted the Passover. And humanly speaking, he did, but not on his own. He stood between God and the people.

When you think of the Exodus experiences, Moses was instrumental in the saving of the firstborn. Moses was not a firstborn himself, but that makes no difference. Without Moses' mediation, the idea of the first born belonging to God would not have been made known. God spoke to Moses. God spoke

through Moses, and by Moses, the firstborn was set aside. We know too that the firstborn is very closely related to the only-begotten. I wish we could spend a little more time on that, but we must move on to the next point. Moses was the means for Israel to gain great wealth, because he stood up to Pharaoh. He was mediating for Israel and in the midst of those experiences, the Israelites received bounty from the Egyptians. Moses stands high and tall in the midst of all that.

When you think of the miraculous events—I'm thinking now particularly of the Red Sea opening up, the provision of food, the quail, the water from the rock—again Moses becomes the miracle worker. These occur when Moses raised his hand. As with the plagues so now with the opening of the Red Sea. Moses raised his hand and the waters parted. When Moses dropped his hand, the waters came together. God, the angel of the LORD, was working in and through Moses, the mediator. If for the reason that Moses is the mediator, he is also called the Old Testament redeemer. Have you come across that little phrase in Vos' *Biblical Theology*? I like that phrase. Moses became a redeemer.

Vos talks about the realism of the redemptive events. Everything that the Bible says took place actually took place. These are supernatural acts, but they truly occurred. The principle of supernaturalism was already obvious in the life and the experiences of the patriarchs, so now it is even more obvious in the life of Moses. Not only are they supernatural, they also are very objective. These are events that actually happened. Moses, the mediator, stood there and God working through him caused these things to happen. Redemption came to Israel because Moses was there, because Moses obeyed, because Moses carried out every act that God told him to. The raising of the hand, the speaking, the leading, bringing sweet water, praying, that redemption was real.

That redemption was not just a physical redemption. It was a social redemption, it was a cultural redemption, and it was a spiritual redemption. Egypt was a place of much idolatry and wickedness. The Pharaoh was the god and the oppression that Pharaoh exerted was an oppression that was demonic, so this redemption was a redemption from every aspect, from any sphere that you could think. Moses redeemed in a way that was objective, integral, and whole. He did this redeeming by carrying out the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king. He spoke, he was a prophet and in Deuteronomy 18 he talks about "a prophet like unto me." Moses was also a priest by the way he interceded. We see it in Exodus 32, but also Moses was the priest in that he actually brought the people before God as he spoke and brought God to the people, so the prophetic and the priestly office functions really come together. In what sense is Moses king? He was a royal figure when he stood in front of Pharaoh. He was not a king in a technical sense, but he was regal in his conduct. He was regal in his speech. He was regal in his activities. Later, at Mt. Sinai, he became the spokesman for the law. He became the lawgiver. He became the chief administrator, doing what the king was supposed to do. He was the one who directed the people's protection. He was the one at the very center of their getting food and drink. The office of the great shepherd, the royal shepherd, is there in the Book of Exodus. Moses, the threefold office bearer, is the Old Testament redeemer, but he did nothing in his own. He was but a servant of the great Moses to come.

And I close again by saying if you teach and preach, working with Exodus 1 to 18, remember that it is Christ at the heart of everything there, the Second Person of the Trinity who was the *male'ak Yahweh*, the angel of the LORD. It is God the Word who causes so much to happen. Christ is central. He is pre-incarnate, but He almost becomes incarnate in Moses.