

# OpenTheo

## February 27th: Exodus 6 & Matthew 12:1-21

February 26, 2020



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YHWH reassures Moses and the genealogy of Moses and Aaron. The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath.

Some passages referenced:

Exodus 3:6-8, 14-15/6:2-8; 4:10/6:12b; 4:16/7:1; 3:19f./6:7, 7:4f. (parallels between Moses' initial call and its reconfirmation); Genesis 15:16 (returning in the fourth generation).

Exodus 31:12-17 (Sabbath as the great sign of the covenant at Sinai); 1 Samuel 21:1-7 (David and his men eating the shewbread); Hosea 6:6 (mercy not sacrifice); 1 Kings 13:4-6 (Jeroboam's withered hand); Isaiah 42:1-3 (the prophecy of the gentle Servant); Ezekiel 34:11-24 (YHWH coming to the rescue of his sheep).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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### Transcript

Exodus 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. 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, Hanok, 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. 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, Livni, 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 Uzziel, Mishiel, Elzaphan, and Zithri. Aaron took as his wife Elishabeth, the daughter of Amminadab, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

The sons of Korah, Asaiah, Elkanah, and Abiasath. 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

Phinehas.

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. 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. I'm slow of speech and of tongue. I am of uncircumcised lips.

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. 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's 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's 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.

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. Then finally he gives the promise of the land. The very centre 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. 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. 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. 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. 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 Bajan 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 has 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 Kvod 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.

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 are 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 is made to Abraham. It is interesting to note that there are a number of women mentioned within this genealogy.

Amram marries Jochebed, who is again the 26th person within the list. She is someone who is the first person to have the name of Yahweh included in her name in scripture and she is the mother of Moses and Aaron. She has already been an actor within the story so far but not named.

Aaron marries Elishabeth and Elishabeth is a daughter of Amminadab and a sister of Nashon. She is 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 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 is 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. 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. 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? Matthew chapter 12 verses 1 to 21.

He went on from there and entered their synagogue and a man was there with a withered hand and they asked him, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him? He said to them, which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep? So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Then he said to the man, stretch out your hand and the man stretched it out and it was restored healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there and many followed him and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah. Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.

I will put my spirit upon him and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break and a smouldering wick he will not quench.

Until he brings justice to victory and in his name the Gentiles will hope. In the first half of Matthew chapter 12 there are two incidents that focus upon Jesus' relationship to the Sabbath. He demonstrates that as he declared concerning himself at the end of the previous chapter, he is the one who gives rest, the true intent of the Sabbath.

These Sabbath stories are easily misunderstood as Jesus presenting some technical legal exceptions to the law or simply trumping it. There is more going on here however. Jesus

is revealing the deeper intent of the law and the place of the Sabbath within the larger structure of God's purpose.

Jesus is fulfilling the law, not merely trumping it. Jesus reveals that the Sabbath was given for rest, not as a burden upon people. The Sabbath is for giving relief to the burdened, whether by hunger or by ailment or infirmity.

People who are bearing heavy burdens should find rest on that day of the Sabbath. We should bear in mind here that the Sabbath played a very important part in Israel's identity. It was the great sign of the covenant at Sinai, as circumcision was of the covenant made with Abraham.

If we compare Exodus chapter 31 with Genesis chapter 17 we can see many parallels between these two signs. To violate the Sabbath was a very serious offence then. It was to violate the covenant itself.

Jesus challenges the practice, or rather the non-practice of the Sabbath, the way that the Sabbath was made into a burden rather than a gift of rest that actually fulfilled its intent in the book of Exodus. The disciples were permitted by the law to eat of the grain as they passed through a field. This was a general thing that was permitted to do as a result of the gleaning commandments.

So the point of the Pharisees' objection was not that they were stealing some food that wasn't their own. They had every right to eat of the food for the most part. The issue was whether this constituted work on the Sabbath.

And if it constituted work they were breaking the law of the Sabbath. And Jesus in response gives the examples of David and the priests. In 1 Samuel 21 verses 1-7 David and his hungry men were permitted to eat of the showbread.

Now that's usually restricted to the priests. But Ahimelech the priest recognised that the law of the showbread existed for the good of God's people, not merely as an end in itself. And in those circumstances the hunger of David and his men took precedence over rigorous adherence to the letter of the law.

Not because it was a breaking of the law and something that trumped the law, but because that was the actual intent of the law all the way along. It is also important that it was David for whom this was permitted. We're not necessarily to presume that this would be the case for anyone who came along.

Rather Jesus is presenting himself to be the greater David who has the prerogative to determine in this sort of instance. His men are like David's men. Likewise they're also akin to the priests who have to do the work of Yahweh on the Sabbath even though it involves labour that would be prohibited under other circumstances.



They're moving sacrifices around. They're doing particular tasks that in any other context they would be prohibited. But within the context of the service of the tabernacle it does not count as work.

It does not count as a breaking of the Sabbath. Likewise Jesus' disciples are committed to a divine ministry and that divine ministry takes priority and it's not a violation of the Sabbath at all. The work of the priests isn't counted as Sabbath-breaking work because it is in service of the temple.

And now there's something greater than the temple here. Jesus himself. Now just think how startling a claim this is, what it implies.

The temple was the place where God was present with his people and the place where service to God was rendered. And Christ is declaring that he is not just the greater David but the greater temple. He is the site where God is present and as his disciples follow and serve him their activities are not a breaking but a fulfilment of the intent of the Sabbath.

Once again Jesus refers to Hosea chapter 6 verse 6. God desires mercy not sacrifice. And the contrast here is between law-keeping for its own sake and law-keeping that is truly ordered towards the fulfilment of God's will. The point of the law is not just to obey a rigorous set of commandments, it's to fulfil God's will.

This is something that we've been seeing in the book of Matthew to this point, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is the one who fulfils the law and the righteousness of his disciples exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees. The scribes and the Pharisees do not understand what it means that God desires mercy not sacrifice.

They're focused upon rigorous adherence to the letter of the law and yet they do not bring rest. They're not bringing God's peace. They're not the people who are fulfilling God's redemptive purpose as Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount that his disciples must do.

They are the ones who are bringing righteousness into relationships, healing to broken situations and that's what the law always intended. The law of the Sabbath was not just about rigorous adherence to some principle of rest, it's about giving rest to people. It's about entering into God's rest and bringing that rest to others.

And Christ is a living Sabbath, a living rest giver. He's the one who goes through the land giving rest to people who are struggling under heavy burdens. He's the one who pulls out sheep from pits on the Sabbath.

He's coming to people who are laboring and are heavy laden like the Israelites were in the land of Egypt and he's giving them rest. He's a walking Sabbath and his disciples are acting in service of him. Now as the Pharisees oppose him, as they oppose his giving of

rest to people like the man with the withered hand, what they're doing is fundamentally opposing the Sabbath principle itself.

They may think they're obeying the letter of the law but they're undermining the very spirit of it. Christ is the one who gives the true rest that the Sabbath bears witness to. He is the Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus directly responds to the challenge of his opponents by healing a man in the synagogue with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Again he's giving rest on the Sabbath which fulfills the intent and the commandment of the Sabbath. And he illustrates this with the example of a sheep that needs aid on the Sabbath day.

Now people are far more important than sheep as Christ points out but he's also acting as the good shepherd in this instant. He's the one who replaces the false shepherds. The people of Israel are like sheep without a shepherd and as God declares he will do in Ezekiel chapter 34, he has come in person in Jesus Christ to seek out the lost sheep, to seek out the sheep that have been left as if sheep without a shepherd, that have been preyed upon by predatory shepherds who have been false and unfaithful.

Jesus has come to rescue the sheep from the ditch and to bring them out and bring them into Sabbath rest. He is the one who declares the acceptable year of the Lord, the year of the Lord's favour, the Jubilee year, the great year of rest for God's people. And the sheep in the ditch isn't enjoying the Sabbath rest that is God's gift to the animals so it's the duty of the owner to relieve the sheep's distress and give him the rest that belongs to him.

Sabbath keeping is about giving rest, not laying heavy burdens on people and all of this demonstrates the way that Christ describes himself on his yoke at the end of the previous chapter. In healing a person with a withered hand Jesus might also be referring back to an Old Testament narrative. In 1 Kings chapter 13 a man of God confronts the wicked King Jeroboam and declares that he's going to be judged and the king reaches out his hand to say seize him and his hand withers and then the man of God heals that withered hand.

There are similar themes playing here. The people are trying to seize Christ and Christ's healing of a man with a withered hand might bring that biblical memory to mind. We might think about the story of Jeroboam, his rebellion and the fact that here is the true heir of the Davidic kingdom and he is restoring but also judging the false rulers who are trying to seize him.

Knowing that the Pharisees are seeking to destroy him Jesus then withdraws from them and this is presented as a fulfillment of Isaiah chapter 42. Jesus is the humble and the gentle deliverer of the people. He's not concerned with proud assertion of his status, with flaunting his power or with contentious argument but with gracious action towards

the weak, the vulnerable, the wounded, the oppressed and the outsiders such as the Gentiles.

That is Christ's way of being. That's what marks him out. The reference to the Gentiles here anticipates the Great Commission while the beginning of verse 18 looks back to chapters 1 to 4 of the book.

Jesus is the one who is the son, the servant who has been chosen, the one who has been anointed with the spirit of God. In all of his actions and words here then Jesus is underlining the meaning of the words that end chapter 11. Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Sabbath rest, true Sabbath rest. He is the Lord of the Sabbath who's giving rest to a beleaguered and a troubled people who are labouring under these heavy burdens. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart.

He is the one who is not going to break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick and you will find rest for your souls. Again that Sabbath theme coming to the forefront. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Contrasted with the heavy legalistic burdens of those who desire sacrifice rather than mercy, Christ is the one who shows mercy to the lost and wounded and beleaguered sheep of the house of Israel. And while their shepherds will fleece them and seek to oppress them and prey upon them, Christ will bring them rest as the true Davidic shepherd. As the true temple, he is going to be the place where they find communion with God.

And as the one who fulfils all that his namesake Joshua anticipated, he will bring them into the greater promised land. A question to consider. In Jesus' teaching in this chapter, he's exposing a fundamental perversion of the purpose of the law where the law is made into a means of imposing burdens upon people rather than actually fulfilling the will of God and giving his sheep rest.

What are some ways in which we can pervert Christ's command in a similar way and how can we avoid or overcome such errors?