

## **Exodus Chapters 4-6: God's Work of Redemption for Israel**

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Exodus

In response to Moses' questioning, God clarified the design of his work. What we read here in Exodus 6:2-8 pertains not only to the immediate context of Israel's oppression in Egypt. It frames an agenda that embraces all of God's work in the Bible.

The key phrase "I am the Lord" reminds us of the authority behind God's intentions. God is the covenant-making, promise-keeping God who appeared to the patriarchs. The work God is about to do for his people is therefore grounded in the intentions that God has expressed to them. Namely, these are to multiply Abraham's descendants, to make his name great, and to bless him so that through Abraham, God would bless all the families of the earth.

God's then reveals his work of redemption: "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" (Exod. 6:6). Inherent in this work of liberation is the frank truth that the world is a place of manifold oppression. God delivered his people by stepping into their world and effecting a change "on the ground," so to speak.

Next, the Lord promises to form a godly community. “I will take you as my people, and I will be your God” (Exod. 6:7). God did not deliver his people so they could live however they pleased, nor did he deliver them as isolated individuals. He intended to create a qualitatively different kind of community in which his people would live with him and one another in covenantal faithfulness.

Third, the Lord will create an ongoing relationship between himself and his people. “You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians” (Exod. 6:7). All of the other statements of God’s purpose begin with the word I except this one. Here, the focus is on you. God intends his people to know him, both as their promise-keeping God who fights on their behalf, and as Jesus, whose name “Emmanuel” means God “with us” in relationship.

Lastly, God intends for his people to experience the good life. “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” (Exod. 6:8). The land of Canaan is a land of promise and provision. Here again we see that God’s work of salvation is a setting to right of his entire creation—physical environment, people, culture, and economics.

Consider how our work today may express these same redemptive purposes. First, God’s will is to deliver people from oppression and the

harmful conditions of life. Some of that work rescues people from physical dangers; other work focuses on the alleviation of psychological and emotional trauma.

God's work also encompasses community and relationships. Building community and relationships can be the object of our job, as in the case of social directors, event planners, parents and family members, and many others. But they can also be elements of our job, whatever our occupation. When we welcome and assist new workers, ask and listen as others talk about matters of significance, take the trouble to meet someone in person, or send a note of encouragement, we are fulfilling God's purposes day by day.

Finally, godly work promotes the good life. God led his people out of Egypt in order to bring them in to the Promised Land where they could settle, live, and develop. Yet, what Israel experienced there was far less than God's ideal. Likewise, what Christians experience in the world is not ideal either. It is vital, then, that God's blessing be worked out in the way we live and work with one another. Godly work embraces the wide spectrum of life as God intends it to be: full of love, justice, and mercy.