

When we meet people for the first time, what are the questions we tend to ask them? “What is your name? What do you do? Where are you from?” right? That is how we locate a person socially and culturally and begin to get to know them. In the Hebrew culture within which the Bible was written, however, for the most part, those would *not* be the key questions to ask. The key question in that culture would be “who is your father and who are his people?” The way you identified important people and, therefore the way the Bible tends to identify significant characters, is not to tell us their name, jobs, or where they live, but to recite the list of their ancestors, to give us their genealogy. Genealogies, when we come across them in the Bible, tend to be seen as barriers that interrupt the flow of the story. They seem to get in the way. We are not really sure what their point is. They seem to appear at odd moments in the story line.

And the genealogy in Exodus 6 is no different, is it? Look where it comes in the narrative; not at the beginning when we are first introduced to Moses, not in Exodus 3 when Moses has his life altering interview with the LORD, but here in chapter 6 just as the action begins to heat up. The narrative tension has been building and building. God has sent Moses back to rescue Israel, remember? Moses has hedged and dodged and excused himself. The LORD counters every argument and silences every protest and then sends Moses back, and so at last, Moses goes. With the command and promise of God, the permission of Jethro, his Midianite father-in-law, and the help of Aaron, his brother and spokesman, Moses goes back to Egypt. *And then everything goes horribly wrong.* The Israelites’ situation does *not* get better. They are not led in triumph from bondage out into “the glorious liberty of the children of God.” No, the Egyptian despot, Pharaoh, loses his temper, flies into a rage, and withholds the straw needed for the Hebrew slaves to make bricks, while demanding that they continue to produce the same quota as before. The slavery of the Hebrews has been exacerbated, not relieved, by Moses’ obedience to the Lord.

And having established this conflict, having carefully developed this narrative tension, like the master story teller he is, Moses interrupts the narrative completely at this point. Just as we are all asking, “What is going *on*? Why hasn’t

Moses affected the deliverance he said he would? How will God's people be redeemed? What is going to happen next? How is Moses going to get out of this one?" Moses keeps us on the edge of our seats with a hiatus, a cliff hanger, as he inserts this genealogy. It is a powerful literary device that heightens the tension and makes the unfolding story even more riveting.

But there is much more going on here than Moses flexing his artistic and literary muscles. The interruption is not pointless audience manipulation. It is a moment of *theological instruction*. The narrator presses the pause button on the unfolding drama and makes some important points about God's salvation and God's saviors to help orient us to the action as it unfolds. Now I know what you're thinking: how do you make theological points with genealogy? It's just a list of names, right?

Well, let's look at it together for a few moments. This genealogy teaches us, first, about our covenantal salvation. And the first thing to see here about our covenantal salvation is its *context*. Look at the passage, please. It begins with the tribes of Israel, beginning with Reuben in verse 14, and working chronologically from there until, in verse 16, it comes to the particular tribe that Moses wishes to focus on, the tribe of *Levi*. From there the sons of Levi are listed, until we come to the line from which Moses and Aaron are descended, and then special attention is given to the sons of Aaron, and we'll come back to why that is in a few moments. But what I want you to see at this point is the veritable rogues' gallery that constitutes our two heroes' ancestors. This is a list of heroes and villains. And that is important because it is also a list that connects Moses and Aaron to the patriarchs. It ties these two central figures of the Exodus story to the central figures of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis. In other words, the fathers, with whom God first made the covenant, a point emphasized again and again by the LORD as he reassures Moses in Exodus chapters 3-5, that covenant has been embraced and rested upon and lived out by generation after generation after generation, and Moses and Aaron stand at the latest point of that multi-generational covenant lineage and inheritance.

And as these generations are recounted, we have a kind of roll call of the covenant people of God. It is a synopsis of their entire history to this point, narrated by names alone. And that tells us something vital about the context for the

unfolding drama of God's faithfulness to His covenant promise to save sinners and take them as His people. It tells us that the context for salvation is a **visible community** made up of true and false professors of the true faith of Israel. It is a community marked by compromise and failure and sin as well as examples of godliness, faithfulness, and true communion with God. It tells us that not all Israel is Israel, as Paul puts it in Romans 9:6. The covenant community of the people of God is a community comprised of real and fraudulent believers.

Let me demonstrate that from the genealogy before us. Notice, for example, that Moses not only records the line of Amram, from whom Moses and Aaron descend, but also that of his brother **Izhar** in verse 21. Now Korah, Izhar's son, will become the leader of a rebellion against Moses in Numbers 16. In verse 24 the sons of Korah are given special mention for their part in that rebellion. Then there are **Aaron's** sons, Nadab and Abihu, who offered strange fire before the Lord in Leviticus 10 and were struck down in the Lord's wrath. It is Mishael and Elzaphan, here in 22, who drag their bodies away. If you were writing a family tree that was designed to make Aaron and Moses look good, you wouldn't include these men.

Then there's the sin and dysfunction that is everywhere in this particular family: Shaul is the son, we are told, of a **Canaanite** woman (vs. 15), Moses goes out of his way to mention that fact, something that would be considered a serious breach of the Law of God that Moses was to give Israel. Then there's Merari (vs 16) and Putiel (vs 25). These are **Egyptian** names, as is Moses' own name, and Phineas (vs. 25) means "Ethiopian" or more generically "someone with dark skin." In other words, the names seem to indicate a good deal of intermarriage in these early days. Then there's Moses own father, Amram in vs. 20. He married his paternal aunt (his father's sister), which would come to be strictly prohibited under the Law of Moses (see Leviticus 18:12, 20:19).

This is not a list of ideal families. They are not shining examples of covenant faithfulness. They are deeply flawed, compromised, and sometimes unbelieving people. And that is the context within which God has ordained that He should save for Himself a people. The covenant community continues to be a mixed assembly of true and false believers, of flawed and broken and sometimes **fake** Christians. We are not to look for a pure church, though we must labor constantly towards one. We should not be surprised when sexual sin, violence,

arrogant presumption, sinful false worship, and hypocrisy and compromise of every kind find expression in the lives of church members. We must never settle for it. We must deal with it pastorally and carefully and lovingly, using the mechanisms of admonition and discipline given to us in Scripture. We must never settle for sin, but we mustn't be surprised by it. Until Christ returns and sin is forever gone, the covenant community will be a community of sinners: some converted sinners and some merely religious sinners.

But lest we think the messy reality of the church renders it ineffective and useless and of slight value to your souls (welfare as you seek to live for Christ), understand that the point this genealogy makes is that it is precisely through such a covenant community, it is precisely through such an assembly that God works out His saving design and redeems for Himself a people from a worse than Egyptian slavery to sin and death and hell. We are being taught about the context of God's covenantal salvation. It is the flawed, weak, messed up, broken down, mixed-multitude of the church. Yet *precisely here*, in all the mess, the Lord has ordained to save sinners by the means of grace and the gospel of His Son, so that all the glory might be His.

At the last day, angels and men and women, seraphs and saints and cherubim and devils, and every single one of the redeemed will stand in wonder and give all the praise to God who used *such* a vehicle for the accomplishment of His covenant purpose and design! "You used *those* people?" we will say. "You used *that* congregation? You used so weak and flawed a thing as the *church* to accomplish the glorious salvation that is now being consummated before our very eyes? *Truly God is great and to Him be all the praise and the glory!* Saving people by the church demonstrates the glory and greatness of God. That is why the *church* is the ordained instrument of redemption to the ends of the earth.

So we learn about the context for salvation: the church. But then *secondly*, and more briefly under this heading, we learn here about *the structure of covenantal salvation*. If God works out His saving design, promised in His covenant of grace, *through the church*, if that is the *broader context*, notice that this genealogy also forces us to reckon with the fact that *the structure or pattern ordinarily followed by God as He keeps His word to save a people for Himself is*

to do so through family lines across the generations. That is the *narrower context* for God's saving plan.

Remember that God promised in His covenant to be a God to Abraham and to His children and to His children's children. That promise still stands and is enlarged and amplified according to Peter in Acts 2. The promise, he said, is to whom, remember? It is "to *you and to your children*, and to those who are afar off, as many as the Lord your God shall call." When the gospel pierced Lydia's heart in Acts 16, *she and her household* were baptized. Later in the same chapter, when the Philippian jailer was converted, he asked Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" to which they replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, *you and your household*" and this whole family was admitted into membership of the covenant community by baptism. The same thing happened to Crispus in Acts 18. *He and his household* came to know the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 1:16 *the household of Stephanas* were baptized by Paul.

Here's my point: the pattern that we find repeated throughout the Old Covenant *continues* in the New. God's covenant of grace embraces *believers and their children*. The sign of covenant membership belongs to both believing parent and covenant child then as now, and the duty of covenant nurture rests on now as then, as parents rear their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, so that, generation by generation, child by child, family by family, the Lord might build His kingdom, keep His promises and fulfil His covenant with the fathers.

Just as the broken down, hypocritical, sin-tarnished church is the *context within which God is pleased to work to save us*, so the *family* and the succession of faithful generation to believing generation provides the *structure* for that salvation. *Ordinarily we ought to look for and expect and rear our children with a view to God's covenant promises being realized in their lives as they repent of their sin and trust in Christ alone.* So *parents*, take comfort from the normal pattern of God's redeeming work. He has ordained the wider church and the narrower sphere of the family as the primary environments within which His redeeming grace shall work. In short, *God loves to save our children.* He loves to keep His word and be their God. *Do not lose heart as you labor long and patiently with them, instructing them and teaching them and disciplining them all the time wondering if any of this is going in, is any of it making a difference! You* can't

save them, but **God** is pleased to bless your efforts in ways beyond your anticipation ***to draw your children to Himself***. And ***children, teenagers***, understand that God has designs on your heart! He has placed you in families that love Jesus for a reason. Sure they are flawed families, imperfect families. But they are ***covenant*** families nonetheless. He has blessed you with the incalculably precious gift of membership in the covenant people of God and a family where the name of Christ is honored. And He has done it so that He might bring you to Himself and draw you into His saving embrace. The Lord is pursuing you for Himself. The Hound of Heaven is on your trail, covenant children. God is reaching out to you to call you home to Him.

So this genealogy teaches us about the covenantal salvation God is pleased to effect. He does it by the ***church*** and He does in ***families***. But this passage also teaches us about ***our covenant Savior*** through whom that salvation is accomplished.

We said at the beginning that one of the functions of a genealogy for Hebrew narrative is to establish the “bona fides” of the central characters involved. Genealogies are devices that are designed to highlight a character and draw our attention to their significance, almost always as the key figure in the saving plan of God at that particular moment in salvation history. That is what is going on here with Moses and Aaron. In fact, that point is made explicitly in verses 26-27. As the whole genealogy reaches its climax, we read, “These ***are the same Aaron and Moses*** to whom the LORD said, “Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their armies.” ***These are the ones*** who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring out the children of Israel from Egypt. ***These are the same Moses and Aaron.***”

“Look at these men! Don’t miss their importance. These are my chosen saviors!” ***That*** is what the passage is shouting at us. ***These*** two men serve as the focal point, at this particular moment in salvation history, for the redeeming plan of God. And in the fullness of time, the covenant line—only part of which is sketched in verses 14-27 here—would reach its ultimate fruition. In ***the*** Seed of the woman, ***the*** Seed of Abraham, ***the*** Child of the covenant, whose coming is signaled in Matthew’s gospel and in Luke’s gospel, by ***similar genealogies***, in Jesus Christ the saving plan of God would find its final and perfect executor. If ***Moses and Aaron’s***

genealogy indicates how important *they* are to God's unfolding covenant plan, *Jesus' genealogies* tell us that the *climax* of the covenant promise has arrived *in Him alone*. What was pledged to the patriarchs, and typologically fulfilled in part by Moses and Aaron, is brought to complete fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And *that* means, dear friends, that the ultimate evidence of God's covenant faithfulness to us is *not* to be looked for in *our experience*, in *our circumstances*, in *our obedience*, but *in Christ's own person and work*. The genealogies demonstrate that while God's people *never* perfectly live in covenant faithfulness to Him, *God's* promise never fails towards *us*. And when it comes to covenant nurture, especially the nurture of our children, *this* is where we must rest our final confidence and hope: *not* in our parenting skills, *nor* in our own faithfulness, *much less in* our children's faithfulness for that matter, *but in the faithfulness and grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ which is the very heart of God's covenantal provision for our lives*.

And *finally*, if this passage points us to Christ as the *climax of the covenant* promise, it also points us to the *contours of the covenant* redemption that He wins for us.

Moses is a prophetic and kingly figure in scripture. He is the great leader and the singular mouthpiece for God. That is His role. But Aaron is *also* a vital figure. Aaron is the *priest*. And it is this priestly ministry that is emphasized in the remaining section of the genealogy. Look at verse 25, "Eleazar, Aaron's son, took for himself one of the daughters of Putiel as wife; and she bore him Phinehas. These *are* the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites according to their families." Phineas, son of Elieazar, became High Priest in the Sanctuary of the LORD. The point being made is simply that the salvation God had promised in His covenant required *more* than a prophetic voice and a kingly leader, it required *a priestly ministry* to offer sacrifice, to make atonement and to deliver the people from the wrath of the God.

And here once again we are reminded, most fittingly if I may say so, as we prepare to come to the Lord's Table, of the High Priestly work of Jesus Christ.

These three offices, the prophetic office, the kingly office, and the priestly office, ***all coalesce in Jesus Christ***. As prophet He is the Word of God who speaks to His Church still by scripture read and preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. As king He rules His Church and governs all things for our protection and defense. And as priest He lays down His life, dying in our place as our sacrificial lamb, and rising He now sits at the right hand of God the Father, ever living to make intercession for us.

In Exodus God saved by ***two men***, both weak, neither complete pictures, on their own, of the Savior to come. In ***Jesus Christ the prophetic and kingly roles of Moses are fulfilled and in Jesus Christ the priestly role of Aaron is fulfilled***. Unlike ***these*** two men, these incomplete, prototypical saviors, ***Jesus Christ is the real thing***: the fullness of saving efficacy dwells in Him. He is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God through Him, because He ever lives to make intercession for us. We have a great high priest over the house of God. In Him we have a King and Lord before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess. In Him we have a prophet who speaks the infallible word and calls the spiritually dead Lazarus to life through the gospel.

The genealogy highlights these two men but highlights as much their insufficiency as it does their importance. Neither was an adequate redeemer because only Jesus Christ is an adequate redeemer. AND we must look to Him alone.

The covenantal salvation comes through the church and along family lines. The covenant Savior stands at the climax of covenant promises. In Him we see that God keeps His word, and in Him we have an all sufficient Savior.

Amen.