

## Sermon 20, Who Are These People?, Exodus 6:13-27

**Proposition:** Moses, Aaron, and the Levites are ordinary human clay in whom God's promise and provision ran rampant.

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- II. God Works Through Ordinary People Who Dare to Obey His Commands, vv. 14-25
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      - c) Six generations in Aaron's line
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- III. Aaron and Moses, Ordinary People, vv. 26-27
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### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, today we come to one of our favorite parts of the Bible: a genealogy. Now, why are these included in the text of Scripture? There are many reasons, but the most important is that God's promises and dealings run in families. If your parents and children are important to you, then you should love genealogies. They may not be your parents and children listed here, exactly, but they are parents and children to whom God's promises came. The point of this genealogy is given in v. 27: These are that Moses and Aaron. Do you want to know who the main characters of Exodus are? Then pay attention. Do you want to see God's promises of a numerous seed fulfilled? Then pay attention. What we'll see is that Moses, Aaron, and the Levites are ordinary human clay in whom God's promise and provision ran rampant.

## **I. God's Commands Are For His People and Their Oppressors, v. 13**

We begin with the notice in v. 13 that God gave Moses and Aaron a command for Israel and for Pharaoh. In expanded form, we could say that God told Israel "Leave Egypt" and that He told Pharaoh "Let them leave Egypt." The message is clear: God commands not only His people, but also their oppressors. He tells us not to hate and to turn the other cheek and so on. But He just as much tells would-be villains like Pharaoh or other totalitarian leaders to stop oppressing and hurting His people. In other words, God does not have double standards. Though He allowed Pharaoh to persecute His people, He did not justify Pharaoh or let Egypt's king off the hook. In this sense, then, Moses was speaking not only the Israelites, but just as much to the Egyptian monarch.

This is why the church has the right to address the state. This is why we can say "No. This is an unjust war. This is an unjust persecution." It's because God's commands apply not just to those who are already part of the club, but also to outsiders.

Well, we knew that. But what we forget is how this genealogy demonstrates that God does extraordinary things through ordinary people who obey His commands. That's a truism. But it's also true, and it's reinforced by what this genealogy has to say.

## **II. God Works Through Ordinary People Who Dare to Obey His Commands, vv. 14-25**

First off, the genealogy emphasizes the ordinariness of Moses and Aaron. They are not, like Pharaoh claimed to be, descended from the gods. They are quite ordinary mortals; their ancestors were well-off but hardly royalty. No, no.

### **A. Moses and Aaron Are Sons of Israel, v. 14**

Moses and Aaron are just sons of Israel. That is emphasized here by listing the first three sons of Israel, whose other name was Jacob. The idea is to say "There are more brothers here, but we're not going to list them all."

#### **1. They Have Reubenite Relatives, v. 14**

So, because the text says it, I'll say it too: They have Reubenite relatives. The oldest son of Jacob, the one who slept with his father's concubine (that is really sick; I'm sorry, but that is messed up), left some sons who are definitely related to Moses and Aaron. This is far from a pure bloodline, I'm afraid. Moses' lips aren't the only thing about him that's uncircumcised.

#### **2. They Have Simeonite Relatives, v. 15**

But speaking of circumcision, the most notable event in the career of Simeon and Levi was the way they abused circumcision to slaughter the entire city of Shechem, after the Shechemites had in good faith submitted to circumcision so that their chief could marry Dinah, Levi and Simeon's sister. Oh, and aside from this genocidal action, Simeon had also knocked up a Canaanite woman. His son Shaul was the result of that little encounter. Yes, indeed, these are some quality uncles to have.

#### **3. They Are Levites, v. 16**

Well, finally, the genealogy arrives at its real interest, which is the family of Levi. That's what Moses wants to talk about, and talk about it he will.

## **B. Moses and Aaron Are Blessed, vv. 16-25**

As he lists all these names, the narrator wants to highlight a few things.

### **1. Aaron's Family Is Prolific**

The first is that Aaron's family is prolific. Levi started with three sons, and then had 8 grandsons. The line is in no danger of dying out, either: There are six generations, running from Levi to his great-grandson Aaron and then on to Aaron's grandson Phinehas. As one commentator noted, a genealogy inherently symbolizes dynamism and hope for the future, because it is a testimony to the ongoing reality of birth and life and then the creation of new life with every generation.

- a) Levi's Three Sons**
- b) Levi's Eight Grandsons**
- c) Six generations in Aaron's line**

### **2. Aaron's Line Is Long-Lived**

Further, you can see that Aaron's line is long-lived. The four generations concluding with Aaron all made it past 120, and Aaron's three immediate ancestors made it almost to 140.

- a) Levi: 137, v. 16**
- b) Kohath: 133, v. 18**
- c) Amram: 137, v. 20**
- d) Aaron: 83 at this time, 7:7**

### **3. Aaron's Wife Is of the Royal Line, v. 23**

Finally, Aaron's wife is of the royal line, from which would come King David and then the Messiah. In other words, yes, these folks are from a family with its share of nasty people and brokenness. But they are also from a family to whom God's promises mean everything, a family through whom Yahweh has chosen to save the world.

Also, in the context of the rest of Exodus and the Pentateuch, this genealogy tells us where most of the main characters came from and how they are related to each other. That's actually important information. Have you ever been to a new place, met a couple of women, and been told, "We're actually sisters?" It makes so much more sense out of the relationship you see in front of you — and you generally wouldn't have known just by seeing the names. So it is here. How would I know that Korah was Moses' first cousin? Also, in the context of the rest of the Pentateuch, this genealogy shows us that God is preparing everything necessary for His people to get back into His presence. The whole Levitical system depends on having Levites to run it. The Tabernacle would be an empty tent without the Levites doing the grunt work and Aaron's line functioning as priests. God is providing for His people!

## **C. Moses and Aaron are much younger than the rest of their generation**

Now is the time for my chart. Before we move on, the genealogy throws up one more question that has bugged generations of readers. That is the question of how on earth the two different measurements of the time in Egypt could both be correct. Already in Gen. 17, as we have seen, God says "400 years/4 generations." What? A generation generally takes way less than 100 years. And as the census taken at the time of the Exodus shows (you can read it in Numbers 3), there were 8600 descendants of Kohath when Moses was 80 years old. Presumably roughly a

quarter of those had to have been descendants of Amram, meaning that by the time Moses was 80 he had about 2,147 brothers and nephews. Now, there are various ways out of this difficulty that don't exactly make God a liar. Some say the numbers are symbolic; others say that the Amram of v. 18 is not the same as the Amram of v. 20, but lived several generations previously. They point to 1 Chronicles 7, which lists 10 generations from Ephraim (same generation as Kohath) to Joshua (one generation younger than Moses, presumably). Others, more boldly, simply say that the narrator was an idiot peddling simple-minded lies and the only people stupider than the final redactor are the people who believe that he was inerrant and inspired by God.

Brothers and sisters, the solution here is fairly simple. There's no need to resort to symbolic numbers or gaps in the genealogy. Rather, everything the text says works perfectly if Moses and Aaron were much younger than the rest of their generation. Like, maybe a couple of centuries younger. They were youngest sons of youngest sons from fathers who lived almost 140 years. That literally sums it up.

<b>Could 4 generations occupy 400 years?</b>				
Generation	Patriarch	Lifespan	Number of Generations in his lifetime	Total number of Levites
1	Levi	137	3.04	11
2	Kohath	133	2.96	117
3	Amram	137	3.04	1278
4	Aaron	83 (age)	1.84	8487
5	Eleazar			
6	Phinehas			
Totals		490	10.89	
How many years per generation				45
How many times larger each generation is than the previous one				3.6

As the few simple calculations in this chart show, the total years of life of Levi, Kohath, Amram, and Aaron add up to 490 years. So this gives us 60 years of overlapping life across four generations. Even if we posit that Levi was forty years old when he got to Egypt, that still gives us twenty years of overlap divided across three generations. That is, if Kohath fathered Amram 7 years before his death, and Amram did the same for Aaron, fathering Moses 4 years before his death, then the total time in Egypt could be both 430 years and 4 generations. Now, the vast majority of Aaron's contemporaries would be several generations younger than him. But that is not exactly unheard-of. I have a first cousin who is the same age as my oldest children. If he and

my children repeat the pattern, I'll have a great-nephew who is the same age as my great-grandchildren. It's not that hard.

So, based on what we know from the text, we can easily see how, even if we assign 45 years per generation and an average of 3.6 sons per man, Moses and Aaron would be part of a clan of 8600 people, most of whom were the 9th and 10th generation from Levi even though Moses and Aaron were only the fourth. Similarly, my great-grandmother's sister died only a few months ago. At the time of her death, she was part of a clan that easily numbers in the hundreds. If she were male, of course, she could have fathered a son a year or two before her death. Repeat that pattern twice more, and someone of the fourth generation from that line could easily be the same age as those of the tenth generation.

In other words, what we have here in Exodus is simply an incomplete report. The text is not interested in taking the time to hunt down and explain all the apparent paradoxes. All the time, in ordinary conversation, in daily life, in talking to families or to tradesmen, you will hear two things from your limited perspective don't make sense together. It happened to me just the other day, as I was turning an engine by hand with a ratchet while my buddy attached the bolts underneath. I was turning it and he said "Stop!" and I stopped a fraction of a second later. I had turned my bolt head maybe ten or twenty degrees too far. "You went three inches too far!" my buddy said.

"How is that possible?" I asked. "A complete rotation of this bolt would only be less than an inch in length, and I was nowhere near a complete rotation!"

"Yes," he said. "But it's connected to a plate which is far larger than the shaft you're turning. So the edge of the plate has indeed traveled three inches too far."

Well, when you don't know the whole story, it's easy to jump to conclusions. And that, my friends, is what critics and even ordinary readers have done for many centuries with the Bible as well as with other books. But God does know what He's talking about, better than we do. And so, rather than saying "Either it wasn't 430 years or else Moses wasn't the fourth generation," we say "Both are true, and there are a number of scenarios in which they could be true. But the Bible doesn't care to explain how exactly it worked, because its concern is not with exactly how everything happened, but with telling us what we need to know to trust our God."

### **III. Aaron and Moses, Ordinary People, vv. 26-27**

And so as we've talked about, God's power is not just for the special, the young, the bold and the beautiful.

#### **A. They Heard from God**

It's for ordinary people like Moses and Aaron too. The text closes with two points about this genealogy. You know where they're from. They're ordinary folks. But they heard from God. These are the two to whom the Lord talked!

And you know what? You, too, have heard from God. You, too, are the recipient of Divine speech. What do you think is happening at this very moment, as you sit here and listen to the word of God delivered from this pulpit by me, your humble servant? Moses and Aaron were

born of women just like the rest of us. But they listened to God, and they were mightily used by God to accomplish His saving purpose.

### **B. They Spoke to Pharaoh**

How? By speaking to Pharaoh. They told him that God's claims trumped his. And by speaking to Pharaoh (a dangerous business, as we have seen), they succeeded in bringing the people of Israel out of Egypt.

You too are the recipient of God's promise and provision. They run rampant in you, as they did in Moses and Aaron. Who are these people? They are God's people. That's the answer that Exodus 6 gives. And if you are God's man too, then you should expect the same blessings and trials that Moses and Aaron experienced along with God's people. And you should seek what they had: the word of God that worked mightily in them for deliverance.

It was important not only that Jesus came, but what family He came from. It's important not only that you're here, but what family you came from. God knows that; God controls that; and God is working in that through you to do His will and bring His kingdom. So trust Him; He knows your background, and He will work within it for His glory and your good. He did so with Moses and Aaron; He did so with Jesus; and He's still doing it. Amen.