

Dr. John Oswalt, Exodus, Session 3, Exodus 5-6

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This is Dr. John Oswalt and his teaching on the book of Exodus. This is session 3, Exodus 5-6.

Let's begin with prayer. Father, we rejoice in you. You are the cause of joy. If you were not, there would be no joy in the world.

This would simply be a dog-eat-dog place, survival of the fittest at all costs, chance ruling everything. Thank you that that's not so. Thank you that you are our father, that you care about everything we care about.

You're interested in everything we're interested in. Thank you, Lord, that you love us so passionately. It breaks your heart when we sin and go astray, and yet, Lord, you don't cast us off.

You reach out to us again and again, and we thank you. That's cause for joy. So we thank you this evening for this opportunity to be together around your word.

We thank you for the mutual stimulation we receive as together we share and think and talk, and we pray that that'll happen again this evening. As we look at this portion of scripture, oh Lord, open it to us, not simply so that we can have our minds titillated with new information but that your Holy Spirit might have deeper access into our hearts to change our lives for the sake of a lost world. In your name, we pray, amen.

Alright, last week, I left out one point as we got toward the end, and that's the point on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. When I travel around, oftentimes I have a question and answer session. Usually there are two questions that come up.

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the slaughter of the Canaanites. All the other questions are easy. So, what about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart? Well, first of all, remember that the Pharaoh was not a nice man.

Pharaoh was not a friendly fellow who could be easily convinced to do the right thing. Pharaoh considered himself to be God. From the moment when he was old enough to understand anything, he was treated as God.

His way was law. So far, we have not discovered any law codes in Egypt. You have them in Mesopotamia, the famous one that many of us learned about in high school, Hammurabi's Code, and there are four or five other ones from Mesopotamia.

There are no law codes from Egypt. And the presumption is because the Pharaoh made it up as he went. He was God, and whatever he said today was law, and whatever he said tomorrow was law.

So, this is not a nice man. This is a military dictator who thinks he is God and is determined to have his own way. So, it's not a case of this nice man saying, oh, wouldn't it be nice to let the Hebrews go, and God says, no! That's not what we're talking about.

You'll notice if you look at the references that are there that actually three different things are said. First of all, there's the statement, I, that is God, will harden his heart. But also, in chapter 8, verses 15 and 32, it simply said, Pharaoh's heart was hard.

It's just a fact. And then there are also, excuse me, this was, I'm going to change references here. There are four references for this one.

Chapter 7, verses 13 and 22; Chapter 8, verses 19 and 9; and Chapter 7 and 35. So, five times, we're simply told his heart was hard.

He was a hard-hearted man. And then there are two that I think are very significant. 8, 15, and 32, where it says, Pharaoh hardened his heart.

So again, we're not talking about God doing something to this man against his will. Why is he unwilling to let these people go? Well, really, there are two reasons. One, we see in chapter 14, if you'll look over there, chapter 14, verse 5, when the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, what have we done? We have let the Israelites go and lost their services.

So, there's one reason that he hardens his heart because it'll be too expensive. But there is another reason that Pharaoh hardened his heart. And that is, nobody tells me what to do.

There's a sense in which Yahweh is saying to Moses, my command to let these people go is going to harden his heart. So, what we have is a man who believes himself to be God, a man who believes that he can do anything he pleases, anytime he wants to. And God says something is going to happen to this guy.

He's going to be put in a position where he's going to discover he doesn't have absolute freedom to do whatever he wants to do. Why? Because God won't let him? No, no. Because all his life, he has made up his mind that he is going to do what he wants.

And this now moves him into a position where he no longer has freedom of choice. Some of you here are too young to know this. Others of us are old enough to know it.

Do something long enough, and you don't have the freedom to do anything else. I meet students who have never ever done anything extra outside of class. And they say, oh prof, this class I'm going to do it.

And I say to myself, good luck, honey. They have chosen a way, and they think they have freedom, but they no longer have freedom. And so, it is here with the Pharaoh.

God has made the world in such a way that we become fixed in our choices. And we no longer have the freedom to do anything else. This man doesn't have the freedom to generously let people go, even if he would want to, and he doesn't want to.

He doesn't have the freedom anymore. So, what I'm saying is, this process is much more complex than God hardened Pharaoh's heart sounds. Was Pharaoh's heart hard because of God's actions? Yes.

But did God harden Pharaoh's heart against his own will? Never. Never. Pharaoh was doing what he wanted to do as a result of what he had chosen to be for his whole life.

Okay, questions or comments before we leave that? How old would Pharaoh have been? Well, we don't know who the Pharaoh was exactly, but presumably, he's in his 40s. But we really don't know. As we said last week, these midwives are named, but the Pharaoh is not.

Anything else? Okay, last chance. In chapter 5, Moses, having gotten the approval of the people, they're very excited there at the end of chapter 4, God has heard our cry, and they bowed down and worshiped. That's where the fourth chapter ended.

Now, they go to Pharaoh. This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel, says: let my people go so that they may hold a festival for me in the wilderness. Now, was that deceptive? It's let my people go so that they can get out of here and go to the promised land.

Now, I don't know whether you've read ahead or not, but in the next five plagues, every, one of them, Moses says, let my people go that they may go and worship me in the wilderness. So, I'm asking, what do you think? Is that deception? Exactly. Exactly.

They were going to worship him. This relates to what we talked about two weeks ago about the purpose of the book. Why did God get the people out of Egypt? So that they could know who he was and so that he could come home.

The promised land is gravy. So, no, this is not deceptive in the least. This is precisely why they are being delivered so that they can go into the wilderness and worship the one God who is God.

And in that worship, experience what all of us were made for. And incidentally, they could go on to the promised land. So, this is quite significant.

Okay, that's in the background for next week. It would, but it's fine. Pharaoh understands three days will take them beyond the border of Egypt.

If they go three days into the wilderness to worship God, they're out of here. And that's why we'll see in next week's study that he tries to bargain. So yes, he knows if they go into the wilderness to worship a three-day journey, they won't be coming back.

But it's interesting. It isn't let my people go because they deserve freedom. It isn't let my people go because they've been oppressed too long.

Let my people go that they may go and worship me. Now, this is a little political. But what has happened in America is we have come to worship freedom, and it's killing us.

We were made to worship God. Does God hate oppression? Absolutely. Does God hate human bondage? Absolutely.

But he's got something more in mind for us than merely release from bondage. And that's a very, very significant issue in this book: chapter five, verse two.

Look at that question. And remember, you got to keep in your mind all the way through here. Every time you see L O R D, that equals Yahweh.

What is Pharaoh saying? Read it, somebody. Verse two. Yes.

Yes. What is the real question here? Who is this Yahweh? Who is this guy who dares to send a bunch of hairy bearded Semites in here and tell me to let them go? I don't know any Yahweh. So, what's the purpose of the plagues? God's sovereignty.

To teach Pharaoh who Yahweh really is. If getting the people out of Egypt was what it was all about, then one big plague would have done it. Boom, they're out of here.

The issue is, who is Yahweh? And that's going to be the theme running through here again. We're going to see this, especially in the study next week. What's the

connection between knowing Yahweh and obeying him? I don't know him, and I'm not going to let you go.

What's the connection between knowing Yahweh and obeying him? What does it mean if I don't obey him? I don't know him. I don't know the one who is the I am, who is the source of all that exists. I don't know the one who has made the world with the snap of his fingers.

If I stand on my hind legs and say, no, that's a pretty clear sign I don't know who I'm talking to. And yet, and yet, we do. And he allows it.

He doesn't say you had one chance, and that was it. No, no. Over and over and over and over again.

Who is Yahweh? Gracious, slow to anger, full of kindness. We read the Old Testament, and we see this God who's bad. But we forget.

He is mad after about 87,000 good reasons to get mad. Okay. So, what does Pharaoh think about the sincerity of their request? What do verses four and five tell us? Have they really heard from some God? What's he saying? Four and five.

What's it say? They just went out of work. They made this up. Yeah.

There is no Yahweh. You made him up. I never heard of him.

So, if I've never heard of him, he doesn't exist. You made this all up. What does that say about how secular people understand some of our spiritual concerns? They don't know God.

Therefore, he doesn't exist. We're making it up for our own personal ends. It's just a crutch.

It's foolishness. Yes. Yes.

So, we shouldn't be surprised if the secular world doesn't think for a moment that we're sincere. You can't be sincere. There is no God.

They would have to answer to one. Yes. And that's a very unpleasant thought.

So, no. But again, I think it really is important for us to sort of get it through our heads that it's not a question of, well, we don't really like the God that you're talking about. We agree that he exists, but we don't quite.

No. I don't know any Yahweh. Therefore, there isn't one.

We don't ask for one. That's true, too. That's true, too.

All right. So, he gives the famous order. Mud bricks have to have some sort of a binder to hold them together while they're drying in the sun.

Many parts of the world use seashells for that task. Egypt typically used straw. As the binder to hold it together.

And they had been given straw. And now they're not going to be given straw anymore. They got to go get their own.

Verses 15 to 21. What did the overseers not do? They didn't cry out to God. You have the feeling they didn't know Yahweh either.

Or if they did, he was not a critical part of their lives. So they go to Pharaoh, the oppressor, and try to get relief. And they don't get any relief.

And he says, no way. So, in verse 20, when they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them. And they said, now this is where I lost a vote in the New Living Translation Committee.

I knew I would, but I wanted to get it on the floor anyhow. A really contemporary version would say, God damn you. That's what they said.

You know, NIV is very, very nice. May the Lord look on you and judge you. Yeah.

God damn you, Moses. Why do they blame Moses and Aaron? They made it all up. Yes, yes.

I think you're exactly right. Yep. Yeah, I think you're exactly right.

I think you're exactly right. And isn't it interesting? Let's push it back a little farther. What did Moses and Aaron do that got them in trouble? They obeyed God and did what? Yes.

If Moses and Aaron had just stayed away and not riled up Pharaoh, everything would have been nice. Yes, exactly. We would rather live in our bondage than face the challenges that are involved in being delivered from our bondage.

Yeah. Exactly. Exactly.

God is going to come with a couple of big helicopters and get us right out of here. And it's not going to cost us anything, and it's not going to hurt anything. This is what often happens in salvation preaching.

Now I'm a preacher, I can talk. Accept Jesus, and you'll have no more trouble. The fact is you accept Jesus, and the trouble is just beginning.

When you're lying down at the bottom of the trench and not causing the enemy any anxiety, life can be pretty easy. But just step up on the firing step and start waving the Jesus flag, and guess what? There's going to be an incoming fire aimed at you. And in our salvation preaching, yes, we need to say to people, accept Christ, and there will be deliverance from your problems, from your difficulties, but deliverance may come through increased problems and increased difficulty.

That's what these guys were not ready for. If going into the wilderness to worship God is going to involve making more bricks, forget it. If everything were easy, yes, God, you could have your way in my life.

But if it's going to be difficult if it's going to involve pain if it's going to involve struggle. Count me out.

Count me out. Don't want to go there. Yes, they were not willing to be held accountable for what might be involved here.

So, you have made us think to Pharaoh and his officials and you put a sword in their hand to kill us. So. How does Moses respond? Verse 22.

Did you send me to bring trouble on these people? Pharaoh questioned Yahweh's identity. What does Moses question? His motive, his goodness. Now.

In the background, I comment. And. I've said this lots of times and you'll hear it lots more if you stick it out here with me.

Hebrew has a very small vocabulary, and that means that most words have big, big pools of meaning. So, there is this word. Rah, I think it's very appropriate sounding.

Rah. This is a rough guttural. It is often translated as evil.

And that's a good translation. But. It means lots of other things all the way down to trouble.

I've said to students a good deal that probably the closest English word is bad. Hitler was a bad man. I'm having a bad day.

Oh, a morally evil day, huh? No, no. Just one that is filled with difficulty. But the use of the word here, I think, is very interesting.

God, you're causing these people trouble. Are you a good guy? Did you really send me here? To make their oppression worse. Kind of a God, are you anyhow? I don't know about you, but I've been there.

Wait a minute, God. Wait a minute. Are you really good? When you even if you didn't cause that kind of oppression, you let it happen.

Heard about a couple today in the ministry. Who have had their second house burning in two months. Now, I don't know whether people in their congregation have it in for them or you know, John Wesley's father.

They got their parsonage burned out from under them. And John Wesley barely escaped with his life because the congregation was sick and tired of this preacher. But there's the issue.

So, the offer of deliverance has actually made the situation worse. Why did God permit that? Ruth says testing. They didn't have enough despair.

Yes, look at chapter six, verse one. What does God say? Now you will see what I will do. Is God, does God have enough freedom in my life to bring hardship if that will make his grace more evident? If they had just walked out of there, we would know a great deal less about Yahweh than we know.

Now you will see. Does God have the freedom to bring hardship into my life? Trouble into my life in order. That who he really is may be made more evident to a watching world.

Precisely, precisely, precisely, yes. Yeah, yeah, but so often. The goal of my life is not to reveal Christ in all his fullness to the world.

The goal of my life is comfort, ease, and pleasure. And God, I like that name it and claim it theology. Or, as someone else said, blab it and grab it.

Yes, I want a God who will take care of me and supply my needs and do what I want, which is called idolatry. Can I in genuine trust in his goodness? Let my life go into his hands for him to do with as he will. In order that he may be known in a lost world.

These are deep questions. OK, let's push on. Chapter six, verses one to eight.

We've talked about this already, question one. Verse three is one that has caused a lot of scholarly interest across the years. God said to Moses, I am Yahweh.

I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God almighty. But by my name, Yahweh, I did not make myself fully known to them. But there's a problem with that.

Because Yahweh, the name, shows up in Genesis. Shows up quite a bit. It shows up at some interesting points.

One of the most interesting to me is in Genesis chapter 22. Turn back there, please. Genesis 22.

I want you to look. Sometime later, what? Verse one. God tested Abraham.

Verse two. Then God said—verse three.

When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On down to verse eight. Isaac is asked where the lamb is.

Abraham answered God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering. Verse nine. When they reached the place, God had told him about.

So, it's been God, God, God, God. Now verse 11. But the angel of Yahweh called out to him from heaven.

Verse 12. Now I know you fear God. So, Abraham, verse 14, called that place Yahweh will provide.

To this day, on the mountain of Yahweh, it will be provided—verse 16. I swear by myself, declares Yahweh.

Isn't that interesting? Up to the moment of sacrifice, it's God. Now I think there are two possible solutions to Exodus 6-3. One is, no, they did not know the label, Yahweh.

Until the time of Moses. And Moses then, in causing the, I suspect, oral traditions that had been passed down of Genesis. Causing them to be written.

Moses has said, hey, this is Yahweh in action here. Abraham didn't call him that. Abraham called him, in the mountain of God, it will be provided.

But Moses is saying, ah, that's Yahweh that I've come to know. That's one possibility. That, in fact, they did not know the label yet.

But there's another possibility. And that relates to what we've talked about a number of times before. Name, in the Old Testament, is much more than label.

Name is character, reputation. So, I think it's possible that they knew the label. But they did not know His name.

They didn't know that He is the covenant-keeping God. In the sense that they were to know it. They did not know that He was the tabernacling God.

In the sense that they were to know it. They did not know that He is the creator in the sense that they were to know it.

So that's the other possibility. And I think, as the man said, it pays you money and takes you choice. As to what's going on here.

If I had to put my neck on the block, I would come down on this side and say, yes, I think they did know the label. But I don't think they knew Him as they were to come to know Him. Part of my reason for that is the thing that we're going to run into intensely here. Then you will know.

You don't know now. You haven't experienced yet. Who I am and what I'm like and what I'm going to... But you're going to.

So, I would tend to come down on that side. But that's one of those questions for heaven. Okay.

Anyway, scholars have just gone wild over the years over this. Arguing that there were two different books. There was a Yahweh book and an Elohim book.

Elohim is God. At some point, somebody took scissors to them and cut them apart and pasted them together again. And that theory pretty well ruled Old Testament studies for the last 150 years.

And it's still around. If you don't believe God inspired it, then it's hard to find a better answer than that one. Okay.

Number three. What is God going to reveal about His nature and character according to chapter 6, verse 1? Alright? The power of God. Because of my mighty hand, He will let them go.

Because of my mighty hand, He will drive them out of this country. You're going to discover something about the power of the I AM before this is all over. Alright? In verses 2 and 3, what are they going to learn about the character of God? Mm-hmm.

What does verse 3 say? I did what? I appeared. You're going to understand that He is the revealing God. Who keeps His promises.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have been dead 300 years by now. I made a promise to your fathers. About land. About progeny. About being a blessing to the world. You're going to see that I keep my promises.

Wow. What's He going to reveal about Himself in verses 4 and 5? He is a covenant-keeping God. Why? What does it say? Verse 5. I have what? Heard the groaning.

Yes. He's covenant-keeping because He is caring. This is not just a legal deal.

Yeah, I made a promise to those people back there and I guess I got to keep it anyhow. Don't want to, but I have to. No.

I made a promise to their ancestor. And how can I stand by and listen to their cries and groaning and not do something about it? What about verse 7? What's He going to reveal about Himself there? I'll do what? I will take you as my own people and I will be your God. A God of relational love.

You will be my people, and I will be your God, who runs through the Old Testament as a thread. I'll give myself to you. I am the I am.

I am the source of all that is, but I'll give myself to you. Now, that's especially poignant for me because of having spent so much of my life poring over Isaiah and how good God is. But that phrase that is characteristic of Isaiah, the Holy One, absolutely transcendent, absolutely other, unlike anything else in the cosmos.

Who gives Himself freely to a very undeserving bunch of people. Like us. What a God.

Verse 8. What's He revealing about Himself there? We've seen it here. He keeps His promises. He keeps His covenant.

He is faithful. Trustworthy. God, did you send me here to do evil to these people? No, Moses.

But now, because of this much more difficult situation, you're going to see some things about me that you wouldn't have known otherwise. Is that alright, Moses? So, what happens? Verse 9. Moses reported this to the Israelites, and they said, oh, thank God. They did not listen to him.

Oh, they listened a couple of weeks ago when Moses and Aaron showed up with the rod that turns into a snake and the hand that becomes leprous and becomes clean. Oh yeah, they thought that was cool. But now, no.

No, this is going to hurt. We're discouraged. We're broken.

We're not going to give God a chance. And God understands that. So, the Lord said to Moses, go.

Tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to let the Israelites go out of his country. And Moses said, yes, sir. If the Israelites won't listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me? Especially God, remember, I can't talk.

Unclean lips. Yes, Ruth is pointing out that what Moses says literally, verse 12, is since I speak with uncircumcised lips. And again, the commentators are all over the map as to exactly what he means there.

I'm reading the NIV here, and it says faltering lips. But Ruth's point is a good one. Uncircumcised, unclean.

Does Moses understand some things about his own character and his own nature that have to be dealt with? I think it's very probable. Uh-huh, uh-huh. No, you're exactly right.

The literal Hebrew is uncircumcised lips. Do we have some other translations here? What are some other renderings of this? Unskilled speech. Any others? Clumsy speaker.

So, as I say, the commentators struggle with exactly what this implies. But I think the idea of uncleanness is certainly one that's got to be given a good deal of attention. Yeah, I think it's very possible.

The only thing that worries me about it is there's no place where that gets taken care of. In Isaiah, the coal touches his lips, and they're clean. You don't have that here.

And that's one complicating factor. It's possible. Possible.

Possible. But again, we'll have to wait till heaven, I think, to get the answer on that. Yes? Yes? The question is, with Moses training as a son of Pharaoh, couldn't we expect him to be a fairly polished speaker? And I think the answer is yes.

I think, again, as back in chapter 4 we saw last time, he's just looking for excuses. Okay, I want to push on here. Our time is just about up.

Now, we come to this genealogy. The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron about the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt. He commanded them to bring the Israelites up out of Egypt.

We know that. And then comes this list. And in particular, the list, beginning in verse 19, focuses on Levi.

Amram married his father's sister, Jochebed. Now this is one of the reasons I think they knew the name before Chapter 6, verse 3. Because the Jo is a short form for Yahweh, his mother's name means Yahweh is glorious.

So, we wonder what's going on, especially when it's sandwiched between verses 10, 11, and 12, and verses 28, 29, 30. The Lord spoke to Moses in Egypt. He said to him, I'm the Lord; tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, everything I tell you.

Moses said to the Lord, since I speak with uncircumcised lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me? That's what we just had. So, what's this genealogy doing between those two? For seminary students among us, that's inclusio, an envelope. And we've got the two statements that are essentially the same.

It's not exactly the same, and I'm going to ask you about that next week, but it's essentially the same. And in between is this genealogy.

What are your thoughts? What's the genealogy doing there? Alright, it's establishing the line of the priesthood. Why is that important at this point? Alright, alright. This comes back to this worship thing, doesn't it? Why is God getting them out of Egypt? To worship.

And the fact that they are part of that family that's going to be assigned to lead the worship, I think, is quite significant. And so, you notice what verse 26 says. It was this Aaron and Moses, to whom the Lord said to bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their division.

They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. This same Moses and Aaron. So yes, I think that's exactly what's going on.

You are establishing. These are not just Johnny-come-latelies. These are not just somebody that God drew out of a hat.

I need somebody to get my people out. I don't like that one. That'll do.

Exactly, exactly, exactly. God is at work. And these two guys, for all of their difficulties.

And it's interesting to me. As far as I know, I could be proven wrong. It's happened at least once before in my life.

Maybe even twice. As far as I can see, nothing good is ever said about Aaron. But he is the chosen high priest.

My guess is, the Bible doesn't say anything good about him because it wants to depict the true high priest. In all his perfect purity. I think that's what's going on.

But anyway, the Bible is saying, in spite of these guys and their difficulties, and their, from certain perspectives, inadequacies, these are the ones God chose to accomplish his purposes. And that says to me that God can use us. God doesn't have you where you are by accident.

Now, I don't believe in determinism. I don't believe that a billion years ago, God wrote out a list and said, let's see, on Monday night, February 20th, 2012, at 8.01, Oswalt will be in the FAS building in Wilmore, Kentucky. I don't think so.

I don't think so. However, I do believe that God, in his infinite creativity and wisdom, has you and me, if we're obedient, where he can use us to accomplish his good purposes. Nothing is by accident.

That's why I don't believe in evolution. Because evolution says that everything that happens is a result of chance. Now, I happen to believe that the world has been here a long, long time.

I don't think it was created 6,000 years ago. I don't think you have to believe that to be faithful to the scriptures. But, I think you've got to be faithful to the scriptures and say that none of it is the result of chance, that God has been directing every step of the way.

And that's good news. Let's pray. Thank you, Father.

Thank you that you can use a Moses and an Aaron. Thank you for your hand in our lives for good. Thank you, Lord, that in the hard places, when things are going wrong, when it just seems as though you've let things get out of control, we nevertheless can believe you, that you are in control and you're faithful and you're going to use every event for the greatest good, if we'll let you.

We want to know you, Lord. We confess that we'd like to get to know you in pleasant, easy ways. But, if it takes hard ways, then, yes, we want to know you.

In your name we pray. Amen. Thanks so much.

This is Dr. John Oswalt and his teaching on the book of Exodus. This is session 3, Exodus 5-6.