

Previously, when Moses had been called, God had gradually introduced him to the idea that he had to confront Pharaoh and demand the release of the Israelites, and it is was a message Moses was reluctant to deliver. Eventually the argument between God and Moses forced God to give him Aaron as a help and a spokesperson (4:14f.). God, however, continued to speak directly to Moses with the same call to speak to Pharaoh and deliver His people, and Moses could not escape this fundamental obligation God had placed upon his life, despite the pain and anguish all around, and the bitterness of the Israelite foremen (5:20f.).

Some see within the last two verses of this passage an echo of the argument between Moses and God about whether or not Moses could speak properly or well, but the general picture in this passage is of Moses being obedient and delivering the messages given him. Now that the Israelites refused to believe him, he had reason to complain to the Lord that he was no good at speaking! (6:12). It is my opinion that Moses spoke to the Lord at this point with resigned confession rather than objection. This is confirmed by the last verse, in which Moses and Aaron obediently received instructions from the Lord about the battle that lay ahead (6:13).

### Application

When God reveals Himself to us, He frequently does so in a way which gradually builds up our understanding of Him and His work. Throughout the Bible, in particular the Old Testament, we can see how God revealed more and more about Himself to the people of Israel; and there were occasions, particularly during the time of the forefathers, of Moses and the Exodus, of David and Solomon, and of the prophets in later times, when God revealed significantly more about Himself than at other times. These events stand out in the Bible, and pave the way for our complete understanding of God in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, although we now have full access to God through Jesus, none of us knows everything about God. It is the general experience of Christian people that we know God through faith in Jesus, but our detailed knowledge of Him is something that grows with time. None of us can fully see Him in His glory, but if we are spiritually awake and alert, then God will show progressively more of Himself to us, and we will also come to know more about Jesus as the years go by.

The latter part of our text today continues with the oppressive feel of defeat, but it is a defeat before victory. The people of Israel were clearly very low and 'broken' in spirit, but this was the true starting point for God to do what He needed, and most of us have experienced the general truth of life that we often have to fall low before we can rise. The people of Israel needed to receive God's help before they could be liberated, but Moses, as the leader God had chosen, had to maintain his faith however low he felt, in order to be the means whereby God could do the work of salvation for His people. Such is the task of true godly leadership.

### Questions (for use in groups)

1. Read through the passage and look at all the promises God gave His people. Which of them have appeared in Exodus before, and which have not?
2. What kind of oppression produces a 'broken spirit' today? Is there anything in this passage which can give someone who has a broken spirit some hope?
3. If God is constantly revealing more of Himself to us, can we ever say that what we know about Him is sufficient for our lives?

### Discipleship

It is hard for us to accept that we do not know everything we need to know, but our knowledge of God can only ever be less than complete. We have sufficient knowledge of God through Jesus Christ for our salvation, and a true disciple of His attempts to build on this and grow in the knowledge and love of God. This means that we must sometimes be prepared to accept our limitations and be humble enough to see that other people have spiritual insight, for example, that we do not. Those who remain closed to this have closed themselves to God.

### Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, You bless us with laughter and with love, with enthusiasm and joy. Help us use these great gifts knowing that they come from You, and You will use them in us for Your good purposes as well as making them a blessing to us. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN

### Prayer

I will praise You, O Lord, for You rescued me from the depths and You did not let my enemies rejoice over me. I called out to You for help, and You healed me; You turned my weeping into dancing, and You took away my mourning and clothed me with joy. So my heart will sing Your praise and not be silent, O Lord my God, and I will give You thanks for ever more. AMEN

### Other Prayer Suggestions

#### Weekly Theme: the Media and the World

Please pray today for those who have editorial responsibility for what is presented to us in our news and the information given to us through television, newspapers, the internet and magazines of all kinds. Pray especially for those who work in Christian media organisations and seek to influence what people hear and read in a good and godly way.

### Meditation

What language is on your lips today?

Is it the language of love?

Can you face all people, everywhere,  
Whenever, whoever and however they are,  
And speak to them of love?

Speak love, by smiling, by laughing and crying,

Speak love, by forgiving and mending broken hearts.

Speak love, by connecting the old with the young,

Speak love, by sharing between rich and poor.

Speak love, by letting yourself go in the Spirit,

Speak love, by being a new creature in Jesus.

Speak love, by accepting others for who they are,

Speak love, by sharing the good news of Christ..

What is the language on your lips today?

Let love in your heart be your reason to speak,

And may Christ be your message and joy.

### Bible Study - Exodus 6:2-13

<sup>2</sup> God also said to Moses: 'I am the LORD. <sup>3</sup> I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but I did not make myself known to them by my name "The LORD". <sup>4</sup> I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land where they lived as aliens. <sup>5</sup> I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians hold enslaved, and I have remembered my covenant. <sup>6</sup> Say therefore to the Israelites, "I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from the burdens of the Egyptians and set you free from your slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. <sup>7</sup> I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who has released you from the burdens of the Egyptians. <sup>8</sup> I will bring you into the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you as your possession. I am the LORD.'"

<sup>9</sup> Moses told this to the Israelites; but they would not listen to him because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery. <sup>10</sup> So the LORD said to Moses, <sup>11</sup> 'Go and tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to allow the Israelites to leave his land.' <sup>12</sup> But Moses said to the LORD, 'If the Israelites would not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, when I am such a poor speaker?' <sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the LORD spoke to Moses and

*Aaron instructing them to free the Israelites from the land of Egypt; and he gave orders about the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

## Review

Our God is a God of revelation, and has been from the beginning of time. This important passage contains another classic revelation of God (6:2-8) given, this time, to Moses and possibly Aaron as well. Moses reported the speech to the Israelites, but after the previous catastrophic events (chp.5), they were unable to sustain the faith they had when Moses first told them about God's deliverance (4:31). Moses then prayed (6:11,12), not so much complaining to God, but taking on himself the responsibility of failure due to his poor speech. God would have none of this, and gave Moses and Aaron fresh (but unspecific) instructions about what lay ahead. So far, everything that had happened appeared to be a massive defeat for Moses and the people of Israel. However, it was not a defeat for God; indeed, God was only just beginning the work of saving His people from slavery.

God's speech was in two halves, and the first part was addressed to Moses (6:2-5). It was spoken with reassurance, affirming the name of God and making connections between what Moses knew, and the God worshipped historically by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was also the first time that God spoke about the 'covenant' to Moses. He may well have heard about this through what he knew of the stories of the forefathers, but it was important for Moses to hear about this for himself. It was the covenant agreement between God and Abraham which first promised the occupation of the 'Promised Land' (Gen 15:13-16, see below), and the whole point of what was happening was to liberate the people so that they could take possession of this promise. God then assured Moses that He was aware of the distress of the people, and his 'remembrance' was not passive; as in the whole of the Old Testament, God's 'remembrance' was a cue for action.

In the second half of the revelation, Moses was told what to say to the Israelites to prepare them for what lay ahead. Most of this is a sequence of promises and signs (6:6-8), but it is framed by the powerful words 'I am the Lord ...', in verses 6 and 8, framing the promises with powerful words of authority. In the middle of the speech, God says something very important which is easy to miss; He says 'I will take you as my people ...' (6:7). This is the first time God formally states that the Israelites, as a nation, are His own. Now, this may seem obvious to us, but Jacob's family who went down to Egypt had grown vastly in number and it was important for God to state clearly to His people, now a nation, that they belonged to Him. They may have known this in theory through their ancestral stories, but now, God said it to them directly together with the promise of their salvation.

Understandably, the people were unable to respond to the revelation, although Moses was clearly obedient in taking it to the people; 'they would not listen to him because of their broken spirit and cruel slavery' (6:9). This is the first place in Scripture where a 'broken spirit' is mentioned, and an important one, for it describes an important feature of human weakness which is found in other important passages of Scripture (see Job 17:1, Psalm 51:17 etc.). Indeed, Moses himself appears broken before the Lord as he confesses his own weakness of speech. Then, in the unhappiness which pervades this part of the passage, we can almost miss the significance of the last verse. Despite the unbelief of the people and the misery experienced by Moses and Aaron, they faithfully continued to listen to what the Lord told them (6:13), and passed it on. This was the seed of faith God needed for His plan of salvation to succeed.

## Going Deeper

The names of God and the mention of 'covenant' are two examples of how this passage makes connections between the time of Moses and the forefathers. It is important to see how this works and how it may have helped the people of Israel. As we look further at this text, there are also lessons to be learned about how Moses handles this stage of the work that God had commissioned him to do.

### **God's revelation to Moses (and Aaron)**

God addressed Moses at the beginning of this passage with the same name that had been revealed to him on the Mountain of God; 'I am the Lord' (3:15,16). This name in Hebrew is

JHWH, and is what we now recognise as the holy name of God, a name not pronounced in Hebrew, but substituted by the word 'Lord'. God then said that He appeared to the forefathers as 'God Almighty' (Hebrew - 'El Shaddai'), a name that was indeed well used (Gen 17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 43:14 etc), but if you read through Genesis, you will find that the two names of God, 'El' and 'JHWH' are used most of the time. What therefore can this passage mean when it says that there is a distinction between the two, and that JHWH is a new revelation to Moses?

It is best to remember that the stories of Genesis were recorded not by the people who experienced them, but by those who came later. Whoever wrote Genesis, whether it was Moses (as suggested in the New Testament, e.g. Matt 19:7, Mark 12:19) or someone later, it would have been natural for them to write using the name of God they knew, JHWH. This much explains the use of the word in Genesis, including the stories of the forefathers. Now, if you look at the covenant as it is revealed in Genesis, you will find that it climaxes in chapter 17, where God concludes the covenant agreements revealed over the previous chapters with the sign of circumcision (Gen 17:9f.) It is in this passage that God reveals his name to Abraham as 'El Shaddai', or God Almighty (Gen 17:1). For this reason, it is indeed entirely new for God to reveal Himself as 'JHWH' alongside a confirmation of the covenant (6:4).

In this revelation, Moses received the covenant promise largely as a promise of land (6:4). This connection was first made in Genesis 13 when Abraham surveyed the whole land of Canaan (Gen 13:14-17), but another important passage which links with the Exodus story comes in Genesis 15, where God prophesied the enslavement of His people and their eventual deliverance:

*<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; <sup>14</sup> but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.*

When God spoke to Moses about hearing the groans of the people and remembering His covenant (6:5), he was declaring that he was about to fulfil this prophecy, previously given to Abraham, and passed down amongst the Israelites along with their stories of the forefathers.

### **The message to the people**

The people of Israel had already heard from Moses that God intended to deliver them from slavery, however, and were suffering from the fact that this was not happening. Moses was instructed by the Lord to tell them again that he would do this, and their patience and faith was sorely tested. We cannot know what individual Israelites thought about this, because Scripture does not say; but we do know that the people as a whole were so oppressed they could not receive the message (6:9). Despite this, God's promise that He would take the Israelites as His people was a precious and loving promise, and although it was not received by the people at the time, it certainly meant a great deal to those who looked back on what happened and recorded the story as we now have it.

Within this passage (6:6-8), there is a marvellous collection of promises grouped together: God's love for His people, His redemption, His judgement and His great power. These promises are placed alongside the repeated promise to bring the people into a new land for their own 'possession' (6:8). From this, we can begin to see more about the way God's plan of salvation was designed to work in the world. However, God placed these great themes together in a prophetic word to Moses in order to give him the confidence to press on with the immediate task of saving the people, and the force of what God said is also shown by the repeated phrase 'I will', at least six times in verses 6 to 8.

### **Moses keeps going**

We can well imagine that it was hard for Moses to deliver this message to the people, particularly when they rejected it (6:9). Their 'spirit' was broken because of what had happened, but God knew all about this, and was working at the solution to the Israelites woes even though they did not know it. To us, quite naturally, a 'broken spirit' seems to be a severe condition, whether of an individual or of a nation, but to God, it is sometimes the right place for people to be if they are to depend wholly upon Him for their salvation and deliverance; and this is the case here.