
Prayers

To God

Stand up to bless the Lord. If you have words to say, then so be it; but if you have none, let your silence bless the One who knows all things.

For myself

Weekly theme: Personal faith

Sing to the Lord a song that expresses your feelings and your thoughts today; perhaps use a track of a Christian song to help you

For others

Lord God Almighty, You understand everything that happens in our world. Help us therefore to trust in You alone for our knowledge and grasp of all that happens in our world. Save us from being overly influenced by the power of the media and its commercial, political and religious presumptions. Give us an eye for true godliness and worthy discernment of what is right and wrong, and lead us into all truth. **AMEN**

Meditation

Almighty God, Great Creator, Powerful Word,
You have plans for Your creation which are

more beautiful than our finest and expressive art;
more extensive than our most grandiose schemes;

more compassionate than our most generous aid for the poor;
more understandable for people than the purest science;

more attainable than the most imaginative of our dreams;
more intricate than the amazing structure of our DNA;

more complete than any human project ever attempted;
more glorious than the greatest victories of human history;

Fulfil Your purposes O Lord God Almighty
And bring Your all work to its completion!

Bible Passage

Exodus 6:13-27

¹³ The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron about the Israelites and Pharaoh, king of Egypt. He gave them orders to bring the Israelites out of the land of Egypt.

¹⁴ These are the heads of their ancestral clans:

Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: his sons were Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben.

¹⁵ Simeon: his sons were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the families of Simeon.

¹⁶ **Levi**: Levi lived to the age of 137, and the following are the names of the sons of Levi according to their genealogies: Gershon, **Kohath**, and Merari.

¹⁷ Gershon: his sons were the clan leaders Libni and Shimei.

¹⁸ **Kohath**: Kohath lived to the age of 133, and his sons were **Amram**, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

¹⁹ Merari: his sons were Mahli and Mushi.

These are the clan leaders of the Levites in their genealogical order.

²⁰ **Amram**: Amram lived to the age of 137; he married Jochebed, his father's sister, and she bore him **Aaron** and **Moses**.

²¹ Izhar: his sons were Izhar were Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri.

²² Uzziel: his sons were Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri.

²³ Now, **Aaron** married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

²⁴ The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph; these are the clans of the Korahites.

²⁵ **Aaron's** son **Eleazar** married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him **Phinehas**.

These are the heads of the Levite ancestral houses, by clans.

²⁶ It was this same Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, 'Bring the Israelites out of Egypt, like an army.' ²⁷ It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, the same Moses and Aaron.

Review

You would be forgiven for wondering what we can make of a list of names! This reading is difficult for us because a list of names like this has little meaning when we are unfamiliar with the names of most of those mentioned. In principle we can understand that it was important for the Israelites to be clear about 'who was who' at a critical point in their history, and we can also understand why the writers of Exodus felt it important to identify the lineage of Moses and Aaron. This, however, does not make it any easier for us to read the passage and feel that we have gained something of the 'Word of God'!

In the main body of this study, we will look more closely at the genealogy and discover a number of interesting things, including the names of individuals who have an important place

in the later history of God's people, and this explains why they have been included. However, it is clear from early on, despite the opening words; *'these are the heads of their ancestral clans'* (6:14) that this is not a complete genealogy of the Israelites in Egypt. It is reckoned by most to be a shortened and condensed form of a much larger list of God's people, and was probably derived from the extensive genealogy found in Numbers 26.

But why would anyone write a list like this, and what does it tell us? You do not have to read too far to find out. At the very beginning, we read one generation of the genealogy of Jacob's first son Reuben (6:14), then after this, his second son Simeon (6:15), and after that Levi (6:16f.). But after this we do not find any more of the sons of Jacob, which were the twelve tribes of Israel. So why include these sons and not others? It is because this list confirms that Levi was the third son of Jacob and then does into detail to provide a lineage for Moses and Aaron, and in Aaron's case, his sons and grandson. The most important names are highlighted above in black, and are:

Levi, Kohath, Amram, Aaron and Moses, Eleazar, and Phinehas.

Now if we look at the first verse of our reading and the last, you will see that these verses are very similar and state firmly that it was Moses and Aaron who were used by the Lord to bring Israel out of Egypt. The genealogy therefore is an elaborate statement of their lineage to establish their place within Israel. Remember, with Moses having been brought up in the Egyptian court, it could well have been that some did not think Moses was truly Israelite, and he was of the tribe of Levi, the 'priestly' tribe of Israel. His connection with his brother Aaron and his lineage therefore provided the necessary proof of his being Israelite.

When Israel were in Egypt and awaiting their salvation, such matters were doubtless of little significance. But in later years, the people of Israel would find it necessary to prove such things, and apart from the figure of Moses, it was important to identify the lineage of Aaron, from whom all future 'High Priests' of Israel were descended, even to the time of Jesus. The High Priests were significant people throughout Israel's history, and we read about them in the stories of David and Solomon, for example, (the High Priests Abiathar and then Zadok – 1 Samuel 22 f. and 1 Kings 1f.).

There are many other features of the genealogy, for example, Aaron is mentioned before Moses, because he was the oldest (6:20, 7:7). This is yet another story from the Old Testament in which God chose the younger son (Moses) for a special task over the oldest son (Aaron). In this case, Moses was given the special task of leading Israel out of captivity; however, Aaron was not rejected like other older sons in the stories of the forefathers (Esau, for example). He shared in the work of Moses and became the founder of a great clan. Interestingly, in verses 26 'Aaron and Moses' are identified as two individuals used by God, with their names in that order. But in verse 27, the order of the names reverts to 'Moses and Aaron', in order to give Moses predominance in the story of the Exodus that follows.

Whilst all this is relatively straightforward, you may ask why the genealogy includes not just information about Moses and Aaron, but also some other characters including Aaron's sons (6:23-25), notably the 'sons of Korah' (6:24) and Phinehas (6:25). These two characters had significant roles in the later story of Israel and their wanderings through the desert (Numbers 16:3,4f. and Numbers 25:6f.). We will look at the stories of Korah and Phinehas later in the 'going deeper' part of the Bible study, but it is worth remembering here that a number of psalms are attributed not to David but to the 'sons of Korah' (see Psalms 42-49, 84,85,87,88). In later years around the time of Kings David and Solomon, these people were foremost musicians in the life of the Temple, responsible for praising God (2 Chron 20:19). This genealogy identifies them firmly as Levites.

What more can we gain spiritually from such a study of genealogies? Firstly, if we can overcome our automatic dislike of them, we will quickly find that they can help us locate all kinds of interesting facts about people and events in the Old Testament. Secondly, they re-

affirm to us the truth that all individuals matter to God. It surely matters to each one of us that we stand to be counted in the lineage of our forefathers in faith. Surely God knows us and in addition, the world needs us to give our testimony by which we identify ourselves as people of faith who are a part of God's people on earth. Many people today are coy about being a part of a church organisation. It is a strange and rather cultural attitude, and we need to let go of our misgivings and proudly take our place as God's people within His church. God wants us to be His, and we should be ready to proclaim this publicly and without embarrassment.

Going Deeper

Further Comments

Most of the rest of this study will look more closely at the names in the genealogy; but there are some other fascinating details. For example, we will have to consider that Moses was born from the marriage of Amram and his (Amram's) aunt! A union forbidden in Leviticus 18:12,13! The names of Korah and Phinehas also point forward to fascinating and significant Old Testament stories of great importance.

Reuben, Simeon, Levi; numbers and ages.

The list of names establishes Moses' (and Aaron's) ancestry by linking back to his forefather Jacob. Although it seems odd to us, the correct Israelite way to link one individual with another in the past was to track back through fathers and brothers according to age; and this is what has been done here, with mention of Simeon (6:15) and Reuben (6:14) and their own families. Reuben and Simeon were the first two sons of Jacob by Leah, and Levi was the third son after these two. When we get to the description of Levi's descendants, it is clear that this is important because ages are mentioned. Levi is said to have lived for 137 years, his son Kohath for 133 years, and his son Amram (the father of Moses and Aaron) for 137 years.

These numbers appear to be not much short of the age of some of the forefathers (Abraham 175, Isaac 180, Jacob 147, Joseph 110), however the significance of these ages remains uncertain. From this genealogy, Moses lived only four generations after his forefather Levi came to Egypt, and this does not appear to tally with the 400 years of captivity for Israel in God's prophecy to Abraham (Genesis 15:13). To compound the problem, Scripture makes a number of references to Israel becoming a large nation whilst in captivity, suggesting a number far in excess of what could have been generated even by vigorous procreation over four generations (e.g. Ex 1:9, 5:5)! Certainly by the time Moses led the people out of Egypt, the numbers were stated as being in the hundreds of thousands (Ex 18:25, Num 10:36 etc). Because the numbers and figures do not add up, whichever way you read the literal meaning of the text, it is best to consider one of several alternatives.

The first is that the genealogy did not give the real number of generations directly between Levi and Moses, merely the important and significant ones, i.e. Levi and his son Kohath, and Amram and his son Moses, presumably missing out many generations between Kohath and Amram (there are other such selective genealogies in Scripture). Perhaps ancient peoples were more like us than we thought and not as concerned for literal accuracy as we might think! If this is the case, then God's prophecy of 400 years in slavery may be thought of as accurate. Secondly, if there were indeed just four 'generations' between Levi and Moses, then some commentators have suggested that God's prophecy meant four generations, not four hundred years, resulting from some confusion about the meaning of the Hebrew words

between 'generation' and 'hundred'. In addition, there is another suggestion that we add up the ages of the three men mentioned in this text to make the 400 years!

Relatives, relatives!

One of the most difficult issues in this text is the marriage of Amram (Moses' father) to his own aunt, Jochebed (6:20)! It was a marriage that was forbidden in Leviticus 18:12,13, but there is little we can do to explain this. Abraham also married outside the Levitical law, marrying a woman who was his half-sister. However, Levitical marriage regulations did not yet exist in Israel, though there must have been some cultural norms operating at the time. It is perhaps unfortunate if we pass moral judgement on such marriages though, because we have no real way of knowing the details of the social conditions in which they took place. All we can do is respect the honesty of Scripture in recording what later generations of Israelites found to be a very difficult fact about Moses. The fact is that his mother was also his great aunt, and it was she who was used by God to famously save the infant Moses (Exodus 2:1f.); though it could explain why the narrative in Exodus 2 does not mention the name of Moses' mother!

There is also some debate about whether the name of Moses' mother, Jochebed, contains a shortened form of the holy name of God, JHWH (as in later Israelite names such as Josiah, or Joash, where the 'Jo' at the beginning of the name relates to the name of God). If this were to be so, then it would show that the name of God as JHWH was known in the Israelite community before it was revealed to Moses. You may find reference to this possibility if you read other commentaries on Exodus, but few scholars agree about it, and as it is the only example of such a name in this part of the Bible, it is hardly worth taking the matter further.

Korah

In amongst the names mentioned there are a number of relatives of Aaron, but one stands out because of a later incident during the Exodus, which is the name of Korah (6:24). The genealogy also mentions his sons. Korah was a cousin of Moses who rose to prominence when he and his family challenged Moses' authority (Numbers 16:1f.). It was a revolt which gradually drew in other families until Moses and Aaron were confronted by all Israel, challenging Moses' right to act for them and represent the people to God. Korah claimed that all the people were equally 'holy' before God (Num. 16:3,4). Moses became distressed, and God separated out Moses and Aaron from the congregation before separating out the priestly families attached to Korah, who were promptly 'swallowed up' by the ground (see Numbers 16:32 – some think this was an earthquake). The mention of this family in the genealogy in Exodus was thereafter a reminder of the penalty of rebellion against God's authority.

Phinehas

Lastly, one individual is pointed out in verse 25, a man called Phinehas. There are a number of people of this name in the Old Testament, but this man is distinguished by an incident recorded in Numbers 25:1f. in which some of the Israelite people began to intermarry with Moabite women, also sacrificing to Moabite gods. After one man committed a rather brazen act of defiance against Moses' call to cease such activity (Numbers 25:6), Phinehas acted rapidly to slaughter the offending man and his wife, an act which saved the rest of Israel from God's wrath.

Many have difficulty with incidents such as these in Scripture, and I will discuss them fully when we examine them in this series of studies. In the meantime, we should note that there is a reason why Phinehas was picked out for this mention in the genealogy. His inclusion together with Korah means that the genealogy contains one commendable example of priesthood (Phinehas), and one un-commendable example (Korah). In this way, the genealogy served to send a message to God's people that despite God's special relationship with Moses and Aaron, priesthood did not confer any characteristics which made people

better or worse than others. Good and evil was present within the priesthood as well as elsewhere.

Discipleship

Application

Taking stock

It is not easy to see how we can 'apply' such a text as this. There are, however, times in which it is good to step back from our activity and 'take stock'. As any shop-keeper or businessman or woman will know, accuracy in stock-taking is essential, as it enables the business to be properly assessed. This in turn enables the enterprise to move on through proper and accurate decision making. With examples of genealogies within Scripture such as this, the challenge remains for us to do the same spiritually. The list we have read contains names of people and they were recorded for a purpose, so that future generations could read and know their history, and learn from mistakes as well as good practice. The question therefore becomes, what do we do in the church which is similar to this?

Being a part of God's church

We live at a time when people are divided about what they want in church and what they feel is right for the church to grow and go forward. Too many churches, new, old and fresh expressions of church, run the risk of not dealing properly with the past or being prepared to learn the lessons of their own generations. All of us would do well to take stock of the faith we profess and seek to ensure that our existing churches are properly led and run according to the Gospel of Christ we have been privileged to receive. Without doing this, our activities in the church today often look like the kind of fragmentation of God's people which Moses had to fight against so often during his own ministry. The genealogy tells us that in taking stock, we can start by being accurate and precise about who we are as God's people, and acknowledging that good and bad are in our midst, and we need to deal with evil before it tears us apart.

Ideas for what to do

- Who are your 'forefathers' in faith? They may be your parents or grandparents, but they may be other people, perhaps those you have met within the church. Give thanks to God for them and seek to be like them in planting the seeds of the Gospel that has been harvested in you.
- What do you feel about your own lineage, from an earthly point of view? Some find it hard to look back to parents or grandparents for fear of what happened in the past. We should all remember that connections with relatives can either be good or bad, and it is no good trying to determine fault. At least, offer your relatives to the Lord in prayer and ask Him to make sense of any difficulties you may have with people from the past.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group how you felt about reading a boring list of names.

2. Do you feel that the genealogy is overrated or underrated? What can we learn from this passage which is applicable today?
3. In what ways can we 'take stock' of the life of the church today? How has this happened in the past and how can it happen in the future?

Final Prayer

Jesus Christ; You left Your mark on history working with twelve people and by giving Your life for our redemption. Use us, we pray, to leave Your mark on history today; and may we be Your faithful disciples throughout all the years You have given us. We praise You, Jesus Christ: AMEN
