

Homiletics Analysis: Exodus 6

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Exodus 6 opens in the wake of apparent disaster. Moses has obeyed God, gone to Pharaoh, and the result has been catastrophic — Israel's labor has intensified, the foremen have been beaten, and the people have turned on Moses in bitter accusation. Moses, in turn, has turned on God in raw complaint (5:22–23). Chapter 6 is God's response — not to Pharaoh, not to Pharaoh's court, but to His own broken and doubting servant and His own crushed and despairing people.

The chapter divides into three movements: (1) God's self-disclosure and covenant renewal to Moses (vv. 1–8), which is the theological and structural heart of the chapter; (2) the people's failure to receive the promise (v. 9); and (3) the renewed commission of Moses and Aaron, including the genealogical record anchoring the deliverers in Israel's covenant lineage (vv. 10–27), followed by a second sending of Moses to Pharaoh despite Moses' continued protest of inadequacy (vv. 28–30). The genealogy (vv. 14–25) is not a detour but an anchor — it roots the redemption about to unfold in the covenant promise given to the patriarchs, and it identifies precisely which Levitical line God is working through.

The governing theological center is verses 2–8: God's self-revelation by the name **YHWH** (I AM / LORD), His covenant remembered and His covenant oath being fulfilled. The sevenfold "I will" of verses 6–8 is among the most concentrated statements of divine redemptive intention in the Torah. God does not respond to the crisis of chapter 5 by explaining it — He responds by expanding the revelation of who He is and what He has already committed to do.

This Text — Intent

God is seeking to accomplish a re-grounding of Moses, Aaron, and Israel — and by extension every reader — in the bedrock of covenant identity and divine faithfulness when circumstances have entirely contradicted the promise. The intent is not primarily informational (teaching about the name YHWH) but covenantal and pastoral: God is calling His people to stand on what He has *said* and *sworn* rather than on what they can currently see and *feel*. The chapter's sorrow — "they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery" (v. 9) — is not merely historical. It is diagnostic. God speaks His fullest self-revelation into the moment of greatest despair precisely because that is when it is most needed and, tragically, most resisted. The intent is to produce in the reader a theology of hope that outlasts and outweighs present suffering — a trust in the speaking, covenanting God that does not require circumstances to confirm it first.

Subject Sentence: God renews His covenant name and redemptive oath to Moses and Israel in the midst of crushing failure and despair.

Primary Claim: When circumstances have made the promise appear to have failed, God does not explain the delay — He deepens the revelation of who He is, and calls His people to stand on His name and His oath rather than on what they can see. The sevenfold “I will” of Exodus 6 is not wishful speech — it is the sworn commitment of the covenant LORD whose name is the guarantee that every word will be fulfilled.

Interpretive Evaluation

The problem of “I appeared to Abraham... but by my name YHWH I was not known to them” (v. 3)

This verse is the most significant interpretive challenge in the chapter and one of the most debated texts in the entire Pentateuch. The apparent claim — that the patriarchs did not know the name YHWH — seems to contradict dozens of passages in Genesis where YHWH appears and is named (e.g., Gen 15:7: “I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur”; Gen 28:13; numerous narrative uses of the divine name). This tension has driven entire critical reconstructions of the Pentateuch (the classic JEDP source-critical hypothesis, where “J” uses YHWH from Genesis 4, but “E” and “P” reserve it for Exodus). The Reformed expositor must engage this honestly.

The best resolution — preferred by Reformed scholarship (Cassuto, Motyer, Hamilton, Longman, Currid) — is that the verse is not making a claim about the *sound* or *occurrence* of the name but about its *experiential content and fulfillment*. The patriarchs heard the name “YHWH.” They believed the promise. But they never saw the name enacted in the full redemptive weight it carries — they died in faith, not in possession of the land or the nation (Heb 11:13). God is saying: I appeared to your fathers as El Shaddai — the Almighty, the One who promises and sustains — but they did not experience me as YHWH, the covenant-keeping, enslaved-people-liberating, oath-fulfilling God. That experience is *about to begin*, right now, in this generation. The name YHWH is not just a phoneme — it is a biography, and that biography is about to be written in blood and fire and Passover and parted sea. This reading holds both the literary integrity of Genesis and the full force of Exodus 6’s declaration without requiring a source-critical fracture in the text.

Lutheran emphasis — Lutheran interpreters tend to read this chapter strongly through the Law/Gospel lens, emphasizing Israel’s bondage and inadequacy (Moses’ protest, the people’s hardness) as Law, and the divine “I will” declarations as pure Gospel. This is a genuine insight and should be retained: the structure of the chapter *does* move from human inability to divine sufficiency in a way that tracks the Law/Gospel pattern. Where it

can overreach is in abstracting the “I will” declarations from their specific covenantal-historical location (the Abrahamic covenant, the patriarchal promise) and treating them as generic divine benevolence. The “I will” statements are not free-floating grace — they are the fulfillment of a specific oath God swore to specific people for specific reasons rooted in election and covenant. Retain the Law/Gospel structure; keep it tethered to covenant.

Dispensational reading — Some dispensational expositors read the Israel/Church distinction strongly into this passage, treating the sevenfold “I will” as exclusively Israel’s national covenant promise with no application to the church or to individual believers. This is a legitimate caution against allegorizing, but it overreaches. The Abrahamic covenant, which Exodus 6 explicitly invokes (v. 3-5), is the same covenant Paul identifies as the covenant of faith in Galatians 3 — the church is grafted into its fulfillment. The promise made to Abraham finds its Yes in Christ (2 Cor 1:20), and believers share in that inheritance. Applications from this text to the New Covenant community are not imposed on the text — they are rooted in the canonical movement the text itself belongs to.

The genealogy as digression — A common homiletical and popular reading treats verses 14–25 as an interruption to be skipped or summarized quickly. This is a mistake worth naming explicitly. The genealogy is doing load-bearing work: it identifies the Levitical line (Levi → Kohath → Amram → Moses and Aaron), it names the priestly line that will execute the coming sacrifice (Aaron → Eleazar → Phinehas), and it anchors the entire redemptive event in the covenant history of the tribes. It is the text saying: *this is not myth; these are real people in a real genealogy*. The genealogy also positions Moses and Aaron precisely within the passage — it breaks off from the broader genealogy at their generation (v. 26: “These are the Aaron and Moses...”), which is a literary spotlight, not a detour.

Reformed verdict: Exodus 6 is a unified covenant-renewal declaration in which the name YHWH is not merely introduced but *enacted* — God is committing Himself, by His own name, to a redemptive program whose full content is about to be displayed. The “not known to them” of verse 3 refers to experiential fulfillment, not phonemic ignorance. The genealogy is structural, not decorative. The sevenfold “I will” is covenantal speech — oath-level commitment — grounded in the Abrahamic promise and pointing toward its ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

Key Canonical Support

- **Genesis 15:13–14** — God’s covenant with Abram explicitly predicted the Egyptian bondage and the coming deliverance; Exodus 6 is the moment that prediction becomes fulfillment, making clear that nothing in Egypt has caught God off-guard.
- **Hebrews 6:13–18** — The anchor of hope is God’s oath and God’s promise — two unchangeable things. The logic of Exodus 6’s sevenfold “I will” is precisely this: God speaks into Abraham’s descendants the same double-certainty of promise plus oath that Hebrews identifies as the ground of Christian hope.

- **Galatians 3:15–18, 29** — Paul’s argument that the Abrahamic covenant cannot be annulled, and that those in Christ are Abraham’s offspring and heirs of the promise, directly grounds New Covenant application in the very covenant Exodus 6 is invoking. The “I will” of Exodus 6 finds its ultimate Yes in Christ.
- **Romans 4:18–21** — Abraham “in hope believed against hope” — precisely the posture Exodus 6 is calling Israel (and Moses) to adopt. The text models what it looks like to trust the promise when circumstances have falsified it in every visible way.
- **2 Corinthians 1:20** — “All the promises of God find their Yes in him” — Christ is the fulfillment of the covenant name’s full content; Exodus 6’s “I will” statements are part of the yes that has now been spoken in Christ.

Aim: To ground believers whose circumstances have contradicted the promise in the covenant name of God — specifically in the reality that God’s “I will” is oath-level commitment, not circumstantial encouragement, and that the failure of visible evidence does not constitute the failure of the promise.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
6:1	God responds to Moses’ complaint: “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh” — deliverance is coming, and it will be compelled, not negotiated	“Strong hand” — divine compulsion; “drive them out” — Pharaoh will expel them; language of irresistible force
6:2–3	God identifies Himself: “I am the LORD (YHWH).” He appeared to the patriarchs as El Shaddai but was not known by name YHWH to them	The name YHWH is being defined by what is about to happen — its content is experiential, not merely phonemic
6:4–5	God recalls His covenant with the patriarchs (the land promise), His hearing of Israel’s groaning, and His remembering of His covenant	Three covenant acts: established covenant, heard groaning, remembered covenant — God has been faithful all along
6:6–8	The sevenfold “I will” — the	The most concentrated

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	covenant declaration: I will bring you out; I will deliver you; I will redeem you; I will take you as my people; I will be your God; I will bring you into the land; I will give it to you	statement of redemptive intention in the Torah; covers liberation, relationship, and inheritance; culminates in “I am the LORD” as the seal
6:9	Moses reports to the Israelites, but they do not listen — “because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery”	Tragic verse; their suffering has shut their ears to the promise; despair is portrayed as spiritually disabling, not morally blameworthy here
6:10–12	God sends Moses to Pharaoh again; Moses protests: “The Israelites have not listened to me — how will Pharaoh listen? I am of uncircumcised lips.”	Moses’ argument is existential: if God’s own people won’t hear me, Pharaoh certainly won’t; “uncircumcised lips” = inadequate, unfit speaker
6:13	God gives commandment to both Moses and Aaron for the Israelites and Pharaoh	The commission encompasses both audiences — the covenant people and the hostile king
6:14–25	Genealogy: Reuben (v.14), Simeon (v.15), Levi in detail (vv.16–25) — tracing the line to Moses and Aaron through Amram and Jochebed; the priestly line through Aaron, Eleazar, and Phinehas	Genealogy serves as covenantal anchor; breaks off at Moses and Aaron (v.26) as literary spotlight; Phinehas names the priestly line that will guard covenant fidelity
6:26–27	The genealogy resolves: “These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said...” — identifies them formally as the covenant agents	The “these are” construction is a Hebrew literary frame that closes the genealogy and restores narrative focus
6:28–30	Narrative resumes: God speaks to Moses in Egypt; Moses protests his uncircumcised lips again; the chapter closes on	The chapter ends not in triumph but in renewed inadequacy — the reader is left fully dependent on God’s “I will,” not Moses’

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	Moses' inadequacy	competence

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	6:1–8	The Covenant Name Declared: God's Sevenfold "I Will"
2	6:9	The Promise Refused: Despair Deafens the Ear
3	6:10–13	The Commission Renewed: Moses Sent Again Despite Inadequacy
4	6:14–27	The Covenant Anchored: Genealogy Roots the Deliverers in Promise
5	6:28–30	The Servant Still Inadequate: The Chapter Closes on Human Weakness

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

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Applications (Five)

1. When God's silence or apparent inaction has led you to question whether He is working, Exodus 6 calls you to examine *what kind of evidence you are demanding before you will trust Him*. Israel demanded visible progress and received intensified suffering instead; Moses demanded coherent results and received an unintelligible commission instead. God's response was not to produce the evidence they demanded — it was to speak His name more fully. The question this text puts to you is not "why hasn't God moved?" but

“do you trust the One whose name is the guarantee of every promise, or do you only trust Him when the circumstances cooperate?” (*Mind/Belief*)

2. The sevenfold “I will” of verses 6–8 is not a list of potential outcomes — it is covenantal speech, oath-level commitment from the God who cannot lie and will not be frustrated. Where have you been living as though God’s promises were aspirational rather than certain? Where have you been treating “I will redeem you” and “I will be your God” and “I will bring you to the inheritance” as things you hope come true rather than things already guaranteed by the name that cannot be broken? Sit with this: every “I will” in Exodus 6 found its Yes in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). You are not waiting for God to make good on these — He already has. Live accordingly. (*Mind/Belief*)

3. The passage records without judgment that “they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery” (v. 9). There is profound pastoral reality here: suffering can disable our capacity to hear the promise, and God does not condemn Israel for it. But the text also shows the cost — a generation that could not receive the word God was speaking because the hardship had closed their ears. Is your own suffering — your exhaustion, your disappointment, your long wait — functioning to close your ear to what God is saying? This is not guilt — it is diagnosis. Ask God for the grace to hear His “I will” again, even now, even here. (*Affections/Worship*)

4. Moses protests twice in this chapter (vv. 12, 30) that he is unfit — “uncircumcised lips,” inadequate for the task, unable to make Pharaoh listen. God does not respond to these protests by fixing Moses’ speaking ability — He responds by renewing the commission anyway. The chapter closes with Moses still inadequate and God still sovereign. If you have been withholding obedience to a clear call because you believe your own inadequacy disqualifies you, this text will not give you self-confidence — it will give you something better: a God whose power operates precisely through those who know they are insufficient. Stop waiting until you feel capable. Obey the commission. (*Will/Behavior*)

5. The genealogy of verses 14–25, easy to skip, exists to make a single claim: God is working through real people, in real history, in real covenant lineage, and He has been doing so across generations. The line from Levi to Kohath to Amram to Moses and Aaron is not trivia — it is the text showing that the story of redemption is not a myth and not improvised. God has been threading His purposes through specific families in specific time, keeping His covenant alive across centuries of bondage. This should produce in you a profound awe: *God has been weaving your own story into His purposes longer than you have been paying attention.* The redemption you are living inside is not Plan B. Worship the God who has been faithful across every generation. (*Affections/Worship*)

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Exodus 6 is the primary locus in the Torah for understanding the theological weight of the divine name YHWH. The name is not merely a title — it is a

commitment. When God says “I am YHWH,” He is invoking a biography of faithfulness: the God who acts, who remembers His covenant, who moves in history to fulfill what He has promised. The sevenfold “I will” of verses 6–8 reveals the full structure of God’s redemptive purpose: liberation from bondage, identification as His own people, personal covenant relationship (“I will be your God”), and ultimate inheritance — a sequence that maps the entire arc of biblical redemption from Exodus to Revelation. The passage also teaches the theology of delayed promise: God’s promise to Abraham was real, binding, and certain from the day it was made — but its fulfillment came through generations of apparent non-fulfillment, including 400 years of slavery. This is not a theological embarrassment; it is the grammar of faith as this text defines it.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Exodus 6 is foundational for the Reformed understanding of the covenant of grace as a single, continuous covenant across the entire canon. God’s explicit appeal to the Abrahamic covenant (vv. 4–5) and His declaration that the coming redemption fulfills that covenant demonstrate that salvation has always operated on the same basis: divine initiative, divine oath, divine fulfillment — grace from first to last, with no contribution from the recipient required or expected. The chapter also displays with full clarity the Reformed doctrine of sovereign grace in redemption: the “I will” statements are entirely unilateral — Israel does not contribute to the liberation, does not qualify for the relationship, does not achieve the inheritance. God takes them as His people; God is their God; God brings them to the land. The New Covenant believer stands in this same covenant lineage, sharing in the same “I will” through Christ who is the fulfillment of every promise God has made (2 Cor 1:20). The grace that spoke the name YHWH into Egypt’s darkness is the same grace that spoke the gospel into human history — unilateral, irresistible, oath-bound.

Main Takeaway

God has not abandoned His promise — He is about to fulfill it, and the delay has not weakened His commitment by a single word. The name He spoke to Moses in the wreckage of chapter 5 is the same name He speaks over every broken, despairing, this-isn’t-working moment in your life: *I AM the LORD*. He does not explain the suffering. He does not revise the promise. He speaks His name — and His name is the oath, the guarantee, and the ground on which you stand. Stop trying to make sense of the delay. Stand on the covenant.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating verse 3 as a source-critical problem rather than a theological declaration.** Many expositors either skip the “not known to them” clause because it is complicated, or use it as a launching pad for a JEDP discussion that leaves the congregation with a lower view of Scripture and no clearer grasp of the text. Neither response serves the exposition. This clause is the theological key to the whole chapter: the name YHWH is being defined by its *experiential content* — what it means for God to act as the oath-keeping, enslaved-people-liberating LORD. Preach the depth of the name, not the documentary hypothesis.
- **Abstracting the “I will” statements from their covenantal specificity.** It is tempting to turn the sevenfold “I will” into seven generic encouragements about God’s care — “God will help you, God will be with you, God will bless you.” This empties them of their weight. These are covenant oath-formulas, the language of binding legal commitment in the ancient Near East. Preaching them as warm aspirations instead of iron certainties is a category error that produces false comfort rather than genuine faith.
- **Skipping or summarizing the genealogy.** Verses 14–25 tend to be treated as an interruption to be survived before returning to the “real” text. This misses the genealogy’s load-bearing function: it anchors the redemption in real history and real covenant lineage, it spotlights Moses and Aaron as the specifically identified agents, and it names the priestly line (through Phinehas) that will guard covenant fidelity in the next generation. The genealogy is the text refusing to be mythology.
- **Moralizing Moses’ inadequacy into a lesson about overcoming self-doubt.** Moses’ protests of “uncircumcised lips” are not a call to build better self-confidence or to push through insecurity. The chapter deliberately closes on Moses’ inadequacy — it is never resolved. The point is not “believe in yourself”; it is “God uses the inadequate because His power is the only power in play.” Applications that turn this into a motivational template (“Moses overcame his fears and so can you”) invert the passage’s entire theological movement.
- **Treating Israel’s deafness in verse 9 as moral failure to be condemned.** The text identifies their broken spirit and harsh slavery as the cause of their inability to hear — it does not condemn them for it. Preaching that treats verse 9 as an indictment of faithless Israelites who should have known better will produce guilt rather than pastoral care and may actually re-traumatize people in the congregation whose own suffering has made the promise feel distant. The verse is a diagnostic, not an accusation.
- **Failing to connect the “I will” statements to their fulfillment in Christ.** In a New Covenant context, preaching the sevenfold “I will” without noting that every one of these promises finds its Yes in Christ (2 Cor 1:20, Gal 3:29) leaves the congregation

with a powerful but incomplete word. The Exodus redemption is real and historical — and it is also typological, pointing to the greater exodus accomplished by Christ. The preacher who stops at Egypt has not followed the text all the way home.