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The "I Wills" and "I Am's" of God

Exodus 6:1-30

Introduction

With Moses' vision of his leadership role crumbling and the words of Pharaoh echoing through his mind, Moses needed some words of encouragement. God gave him just what he needed. It was a double-barreled reminder of who He, God, was and who Moses was. God brought up His own record of faithfulness to those He called to serve Him, and He reminded Moses that He was able to take care of him as well. He revealed also that everything that had already happened was according to plan. All that follows in chapter 6 is designed to restore Moses' confidence and the confidence of the people in Moses' leadership.

God Answers Moses' Concerns, 6:1-5

The opening verses of chapter 6, especially through verse 9, are a review of the details that were explained to Moses in his call experience and divine commission in Exodus 3:1 to 4:17.

Verse 1. God immediately responds to Moses' concerns about Pharaoh's refusal to let the Hebrews leave. His reply is dramatic and instructive. He said, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh." This response is designed to let Moses and the Hebrews know that He knows their need. It also was designed to state clearly that God has a plan and everything is proceeding according to that plan. Two times in this verse the Hebrew phrase, "by a mighty hand," is used to remind Moses of His earlier promise of Exodus 3:19-20. God was fully aware that He would need to do something dramatic and catastrophic to obtain the release of the Hebrews.

Verses 2-5. As Walter Kaiser observes, "The heart of God's response to Moses and the people was a fresh revelation of God's character and nature. One phrase stands out above all other promises: 'I am the Lord, (*'ani Yahweh*),' " Kaiser, *Exodus*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 2, p. 340. This phrase is used four times in this passage in verses 2, 6, 7, and 8. God's name is synonymous with His character, see Exod 34:5-9. All the promises that He is about to make are based on and guaranteed by His character and past record of His faithfulness in keeping promises to others.

His first example is Abraham, v. 3. He says, "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name *Yahweh*, I was not known to them." This verse has been used by liberal scholars to discredit Scripture and perpetuate the

myth of the so-called documentary theory of biblical origins. These scholars point out the fact that the statement in 6:3 is erroneous since the name *Yahweh* appears 120 times in *Genesis*, while the name *El Shaddai*, "God Almighty," appears only six times in *Genesis* 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; and 49:3. The name is mentioned thirty times in the book of *Job*. *Job* lived in patriarchal times. The answer to this issue is based on the meaning of the verb יָדָה, *yadha'*. This word describes intimate and personal knowledge by experience; see e.g. *Gen* 4:1 where this word is used for sexual relations. This means they knew the name, *Yahweh*, but they did not know the meaning of the name, see J. Wash Watts, *Old Testament Teaching*, Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967, p. 71. God had already given Moses a lesson in the meaning of the name in 3:14 and now in 6:3ff, He is adding to that knowledge. Later in *Exodus* 34:5-9, *Yahweh* will reveal even more of His name and character to Moses and to us.

The point of the revelation of the name, *Yahweh*, as presented here in 6:3ff., is that God has proven Himself faithful. He has kept every promise He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Verse 4 adds that He, *Yahweh*, made a covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan. You can clearly see what God is doing here. He was saying, I made promises to your forefathers and I have kept them all, and will keep them forever. He promised to give them the land of Canaan, and He will do so, v. 4. With this as a historical backdrop God said, "And I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant," v. 5. This was a way of saying, "I am the Lord." You know My reputation. I made a covenant with your forefathers and their descendents, which you are, and I will keep my word.

Lessons

1. When we are in the midst of personal turmoil, for whatever reason, it often is a normal human reaction to ask, "Does God know about this? Does God care about me? Is God going to help me?" All of these are appropriate questions that are answered by God's promise to respond with "a strong hand," v. 3 (2 times).
2. This passage is a mini-version of *Hebrews* 11:1-40. It is a call to have faith in *Yahweh*, the creator of the universe. He sees, He knows, and He will answer.
3. God's name is synonymous with His character, and He has an unblemished record of keeping His promises to the Jews and to us.

The "I wills" of God, 6:6-8

Verses 6-8. God has set the stage for what follows by the revelation of 6:1-5 of His role as *El Shaddai* and *Yahweh*. He mentions the former covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and His track record of keeping His word. He reveals to Moses, and to us, His seven-fold "I will" promises. The seven elements of these

promises are portrayed by the seven verbs that describe all that God is about to do for the Hebrews. In addition to the seven "I wills," the passage also is punctuated with the four "I am the Lord" statements that underscore His character. He is clearly saying, "These are my promises that 'I will' provide and 'I am *Yahweh*.' I keep my word!!" These are the seven promises.

1. "I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians!" v. 6a. The Hebrew verb is *hotse'ti*, plus the personal pronoun "ani" is emphatic and literally means, "I Myself indeed will cause you to go out or exodus" the land of Egypt. This powerful statement says, "I Myself can cause you to exodus Egypt and I will personally do it!"
2. "I will free you from slavery!" v. 6b. This language is used elsewhere in Scripture as the language of freedom from servitude in Gen 27:40; Lev 26:13; Deut 28:48; 1 Kgs 12:4.
3. "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm!" v. 6c. Literally, I will personally be your redeemer, Hebrew *גוֹ'עַל*, *go'el*, the title of the kinsman redeemer. Reference to the "outstretched arm" is used in the Old Testament in reference to God's decisive use of power, see Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29; 11:2; 26:8; 1 Kgs 8:42; 2 Kgs 17:36; 2 Chr 6:32; Ps 136:12; Jer 27:5; 32:17, 21; Ezek 20:33-34. The mention of "great judgments" is a phrase also found in Exodus 7:4; 12:12; Psalm 71:16; 106:2; 145:4, 12.
4. "I will take you as my own people!" v. 7a. This is a declaration of a special covenant relationship that God will unveil at Mount Sinai found in Exodus 19:5. Similar language occurs elsewhere in reference to covenant promises in Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 7:23; and 11:4, or in reference to disobedience to the covenant in Psalm 50:7 and Hosea 1:9. The need for future restoration to covenant blessings is implied in this promise and seen in later passages such as Isaiah 40:1; Jeremiah 30:22; and Ezekiel 36:28.
5. "I will be your God!" v. 7b. The rest of this statement includes, "Then you shall know [by experience] that I am the Lord [*Yahweh*] your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." This is the same as the sign-promise given to Moses when God told him, "I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you [and now also to the people] that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve [and worship] God on this mountain," v. 7c. The process of God's taking Israel as His people appears here in its promise form and becomes reality at Sinai, see Exod 19:3-8.
6. "I will bring you to the land!" v. 8a. This is the land that God "swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." This was part of the revelation and covenant promise to Abraham and his descendents in Genesis 15:13-21. It is reaffirmed in Genesis 24:7; 26:2-5; 28:15; 35:12; and 48:4.
7. "I will give it [the land] to you as a heritage, I am the Lord [*Yahweh*]" v. 8b. This confirms the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:2; 15:18; 17:8; 24:7;

26:2-5; 28:15; 35:12; 48:4. The land was given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and now to the families of Jacob, the descendants of Abraham. In the phrase, "I will give it [the land] to you, as a heritage," the word translated "to you" is *lachem*, which is second person plural, meaning "you all" or indicating all of the Hebrews at that time and all Hebrews who would ever occupy the land. God gave it to them and to no one else. It does not belong to the Palestinians or the Arab nations [descendants of Ishmael], not to the Turks, not to the Moslems, not to anyone but the Jews. Note the last phrase in verse 8 is "**I am the Lord [Yahweh],**" stating unequivocally that it is God's by divine creative right, and He can give it to whomever He chooses, and He clearly has chosen the Jews.

During the period of Roman rule, the Jews clashed with the Romans several times beginning in AD 66. The Roman leader, Titus, besieged Jerusalem and entered it in AD 70. He burned the Temple that was built by Herod. During the reign of Trajan (AD 98-117), the Jews in five of the Roman kingdoms (Mesopotamia, Cyprus, Egypt, Cyrenica, and Palestine) revolted. Trajan set out to destroy them in the first four kingdoms. After Trajan died, he was succeeded by Hadrian (AD 117-138), who suppressed the Jews in Palestine, killing a large number of them.

Hadrian severely punished the Jews. Prisoners were sold into slavery in massive numbers, and Judaism as a religion was under attack. He forbade the people to teach Mosaic Law or to own scrolls of any sort. Pagan temples and symbols were erected all over the province and even directly over old Jewish religious sites. The province itself was renamed Palestine; and of course, Jerusalem was already called Aelia Capitolina to stamp out any reference even to the Jewish names. The people were even forbidden from entering the temple complex to pray at their own sacred grounds, and the outer wall of the complex eventually came to be known as the "wailing wall." He built a statue to Jupiter on the site of Herod's Temple and ended Jewish ties with the land. So the land belonged to the Jews when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and created a territory called Palestine to eradicate any reference to the Jews in connection with Jerusalem or Israel of the first century. By the fifth century AD, there were three "Palestines" that covered the region between the Mediterranean and Arabia.

This was written 2,000 years before there was a listing for "Palestine," designating the land between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea on a map of the 5th century AD during the Byzantine period, see map attached and article "Israel, Whose Land Is It?" The term "Palestine" became a popular designation for this same area in the British mandate occupation, 1920-48.

Note: All of these promises contain first person verbs that are what is called a "prophetic perfect" in Hebrew. Perfect tense in Hebrew means completed action and is normally translated into English as simple past tense. Actually there is no such thing as verb tense in Hebrew. This use of the perfect is called a "prophetic perfect," which means it is speaking as if this future event has already happened. It was a device used by the prophets to speak about a future event, which was so sure to happen that it was spoken of as if it had already taken place, because in fact it had taken place in the mind and will of *Yahweh*.

The "I am the Lord's" of God, 6:2, 6, 7, 8

God's use of the "I am the Lord" statements is significantly placed. The first and the last are brackets to the whole revelation. God begins and ends with the "I am *Yahweh*" statement to make it clear that what He says in these seven promises are not maybe so's, but are definite future events and consequences. The people were concerned about Moses' leadership, and Moses himself was rattled by the adamant rejection of God's demands that he had delivered to Pharaoh. So, the second, "I am *Yahweh*" declaration, was to show the people it is a done deal, "I am" going to get you out of Egypt! The third "I am *Yahweh*" statement follows the promise of you will be "My people," and you will "know" by the experience of God's deliverance that "I am *Yahweh*." These statements strengthen, legitimize, and otherwise corroborate all that Moses has told the people, and what he will tell them as he faces the task of convincing them to "trust me it is going to work out okay!"

***Yahweh* says, "Go!" Moses and the People, NO! 6:9-13**

Verse 9. Moses gave all the words God had spoken to him before the people, but they would not listen. Leadership is measured by results, and so far, Moses was minus six new negative and unwanted policies with three more incriminating results as we saw in 5:4-14. Stuart is right when he notes, "Optimism is often dashed by suffering, especially ongoing suffering. Faith is often diminished by hardship because emotions play a powerful part in most human thinking, and thinking can become increasingly pessimistic when any sort of pain continues unabated. Accordingly, it is understandable that the Israelites would not listen, (v. 9)," Stuart, *Exodus*, p. 173.

Verses 10-13. God urges Moses onward. He is instructed to return and tell Pharaoh, "Let the children of Israel go out of this land," v. 10. But Moses' response is a variation of his claim in 4:10 to be slow of speech and tongue. "Uncircumcised lips" is a phrase that suggests unfit, uncommitted, and undedicated to the task. It does not suggest lack of ability, but lack of availability. Those who follow the claim that Moses had a speech impediment interpret this as additional evidence of his "faltering speech." But uncircumcision does not mean defective, but it means defiant. Jeremiah speaks of those who had uncircumcised ears, Jer 6:10, and others who had an uncircumcised "heart," meaning their will, Jer 9:26. In both

cases, it is a matter of unwillingness, not a physical defect at issue. God was not willing to allow Moses to continue without his whole family being circumcised, 4:24-26. Would God dismiss him now, just because he was not fully dedicated to the task? The answer is no, He would not! God's unflinching answer was a command, using the imperative "He commanded them" to tell the children of Israel and Moses that God was commanding him to bring the Hebrews out of Egypt, v. 13. Even though he did not follow the correct order for circumcision, God's call was still valid to lead the people out of Egypt.

All Things in Perspective, 6:14-27

Some interpreters betray their lack of understanding of the Hebrew mind by concluding that this passage is irrelevant and/or misplaced. But it is not only relevant, it is brilliantly placed, and God continued to speak to Moses and Aaron. He takes up a genealogy of the family of Moses and Aaron. While Moses and Aaron knew about their ancestors, God knew each one personally. This retrospection is a great, purposeful review of just where Moses and Aaron came from. All the heads of the families are listed beginning with Reuben, Jacob's firstborn son, in verse 14, and concluding with Aaron's grandson, Phinehas, in verse 25. It accomplished seven important things. First, it linked Moses and Aaron with the foundation of the Hebrew family through Jacob. Second, it looked ahead to the future lineage of the priesthood under Phinehas. Third, it honors Aaron and the continuing line of the true priesthood. Fourth, it shows where Korah tried to get his credentials to claim his right to leadership in the wilderness, cf. Numb 16:1-49. Fifth, it identified Moses as part of a family of priests and not a renegade prophet. He was able to legitimately offer sacrifices, Lev 8:28-29. Sixth, it reminds the Hebrews that their line was not totally pure by mentioning the Canaanite mother of Shaul in verse 15. Seventh, it celebrates the importance of godly marriages for priests, a theme later reflected in Lev 21:7, 14; 22:12-13. Lists like this are selective and usually focus on the prominent people in the family lineage and are not concerned with the entire family tree. There are many interesting details in these lists, and they should be read carefully, not skipped over.

Here are some details evident from this genealogical table, not otherwise known.

1. Reuben is mention only because he was the firstborn son of Jacob and not otherwise mentioned because Moses and Aaron were descended from Levi, v. 14; see Gen 49:5.
2. Mention of the Canaanite mother of Shaul shows that the line of Levi was purer and more appropriate for the line of priests, v. 15.
3. Here the genealogy of Levi proper begins, v. 16.
4. The sons of Levi, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari are named. Kohath's age is given because it is through his line that Moses and Aaron are descended, vv. 17-19.

5. Amram, Moses' father, is mentioned next as a "man of the house of Levi." The name of Moses' mother, Jochebed, also is included and the fact that she was his father's sister. Normally, marriage of close relatives was to be avoided. The law code that prohibits this union was written by Moses at a time subsequent to the marriage, see Lev 18:6, 12. This means that Jochebed was also a Levite, v. 20.
6. The sons of Kohath are not important to the line of Moses and Aaron but may have been included because of Korah's rebellion, vv. 21-22; Numb 16:1-40.
7. Aaron married Elisheba of the tribe of Judah. She was the daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, both of whom appear in the lineage of David and Jesus, see Ruth 4:18-19; Matt 1:4; Luke 3:32-33.
8. The sons of Korah are mentioned, in spite of the rebellion of Numbers 16, because they were a powerful family clan among the Levites.
9. The final entry of the genealogy is Phinehas, Aaron's grandson, son of Eleazar. Aaron's first two sons, Nadab and Abihu, died as a result of disobedience on their first day of service in the tabernacle, Lev 10:1-3. The other two sons of Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar, mentioned in Exodus 6:23, 25, are also mentioned later in Numbers 3:2-4. It was Phinehas who single handedly stopped the plague because of the disobedience of the Israelites with the women of Moab in Numbers 25:6-9.

Verses 26-27. These two verses pick up where verse 13 left off with the beginning of the genealogy contained in vv. 14-25. These verses simply repeat that it is this Moses and Aaron to whom the Lord gave the assignment to bring the Hebrews out of Egypt. These are the two God-appointed ministers who were sent to confront Pharaoh and secure the release of the Hebrews.

Lesson

Have you ever heard someone say, "If God wants me to do that, He needs to send me a clear document with my social security number and my driver's license number, so I will know He has the right person?" This is exactly what God did in providing a rehearsal of the genealogical information. It was God's way of saying to the reluctant brothers, "I have the right two people, and you are the ones." It also served as a wonderful prophetic overview of the impact that these two men and their families would have in the progress of the story of redemption.

Moses, the Perennial Reluctant Leader, 6:28-30

In spite of all that God showed him through this lesson and review of his genealogy, Moses' attitude remains unchanged. Once again, God gives the command, "I am the Lord. Speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you." Still reluctant, Moses repeats his weak excuse, "I am a man of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh

heed me?" v. 30. God ignored this final word from Moses and gave His further instructions that begin in 7:1.

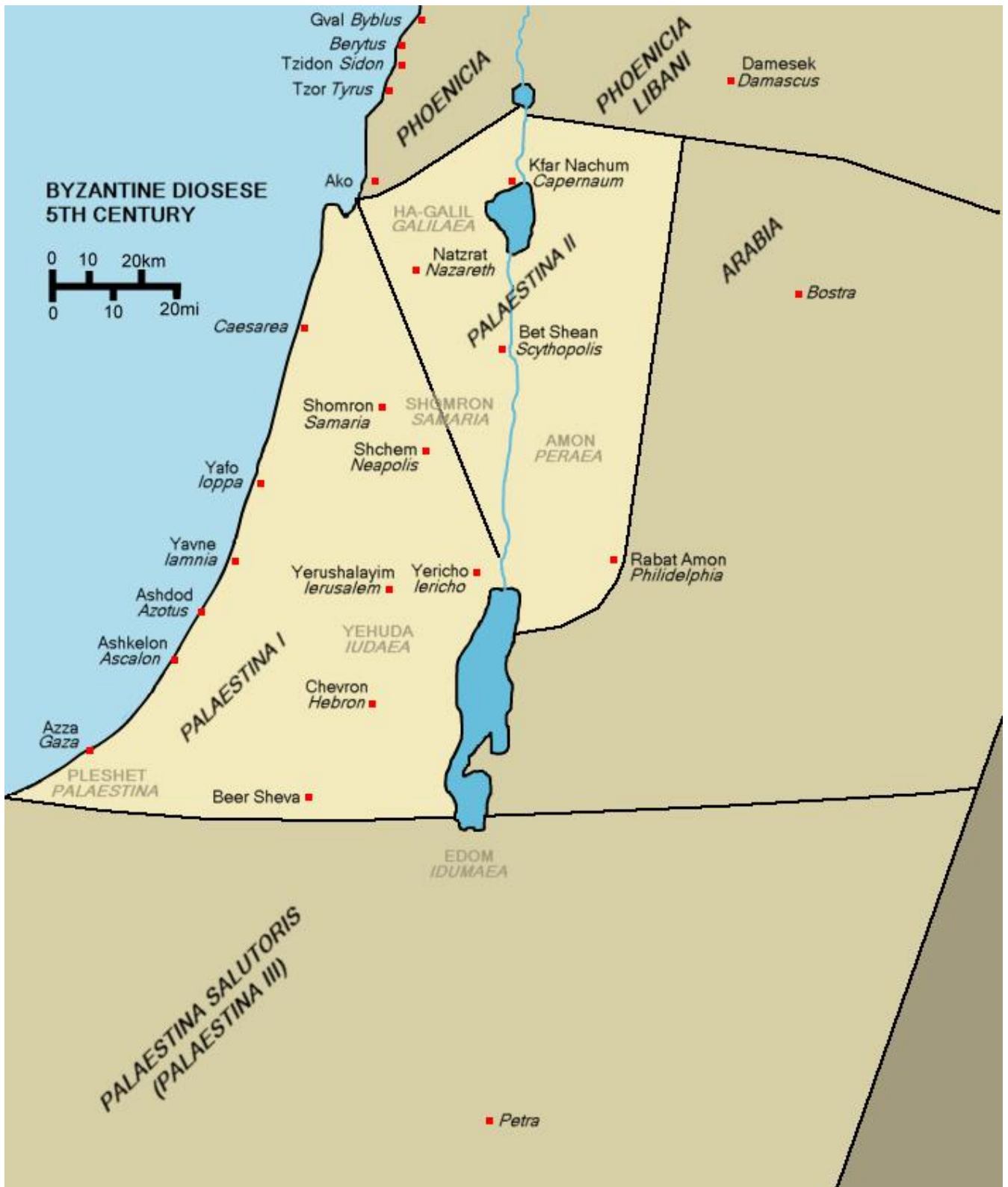
Lesson

When God decides to send someone on a mission, He will not take "No" for an answer. See Jonah 1:1-2:10 in this regard. Jonah, like Moses, had determined not to do what God wanted him to do, but He would not let Moses or Jonah decline. If God clearly gives you an assignment, the best course of action is obedience. See Samuel's advice to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:22-23.

Conclusion

Chapter six is so significant that one scholar claims it to be the central thematic chapter of the Bible. The seven "I wills" of God indeed are impressive along with the four "I Am's" which add to the theological stature of the chapter. It is a clear message of God's determination toward two things. First, He is putting Moses, the Hebrews, and Pharaoh on notice that He is determined to redeem His people from bondage in Egypt just as He promised Abraham He would do, Gen 15:13-16. Second, God is equally determined to use Moses as the one who would lead the people from bondage. It was for this reason that God providentially spared Moses from the infanticide of the Egyptians in chapter 2:1-25. He is not about to let Moses off with his "I am of uncircumcised lips," 6:12, 30. So, indeed, this is a great chapter where God says, "Take notice Moses, Aaron, Hebrew people, and Pharaoh, this is what is about to happen! **I will** accomplish it and **I Am** able to accomplish it. Get ready, here comes the work God has ordained!

Byzantine Palestine 5th Century AD



British Mandate Palestine 1920-1948

