

Study Outline of Exodus 4:18-31

Never ignore the context. It is the key to understanding the passage. This section does not exist isolated from the rest of the call of Moses. It is still part of that call. In Exodus 4:14 God's anger is kindled against Moses. It's not over yet. That anger is not resolved yet.

Who? Moses' family

Pharaoh – God threatens to kill his firstborn and calls Israel His firstborn.
Moses, Jethro, Zipporah, Gershom, Elieser – Gershom is Moses' firstborn

What? God threatens to kill Moses over the circumcision issue

- The Lord met Moses at the lodging and was about to kill him. Remember the context.
- Remember too this is Moses' impression. He gets deathly sick. He assumes it is God's wrath.
- God's anger is kindled against Moses' reluctance to obey the command to go to Egypt.
- Moses is still struggling with the whole matter. He still has reluctance and rebellion in his heart. In the middle of the night he wakes up with a guilty conscience and deathly sick.
- God brought to his mind the fact that he neglected to circumcise his firstborn son Gershom.
- Perhaps Moses himself was not properly circumcised in the Jewish manner.
- According to God's covenant, neglecting to do this would mean he would be CUT OFF.

Genesis 17:9-14, 24 – Note the importance and seriousness of circumcision as a label of God's covenant relationship and promises. Let us read the entire passage!

When? On the way to Egypt

- From Al Bad' (Jethro's home) to Cairo, Egypt is about 422 miles.
- That is the distance from Erie, PA to New York City.
- That is 422 miles or more on a donkey!!!
- How long would it take at 15 miles per day, 20 miles per day if it is just Moses and Aaron.

Where? At an Inn or lodging place along the way

- Hebrew word is "*malown*" meaning a lodge or inn, from verb "*luwn*" to lodge,
- Probably their first stop at an oasis where there was a hotel.
- Probably not far from home since Exodus 18:1-4 indicates the Moses sent her away with his children sometime during or after the trip to Egypt. Since she is not mentioned until chapter 18 returning with Jethro, we can assume she did not accompany Moses and Aaron to Egypt.

How? With a flint knife by Zipporah

- Zipporah is not a happy camper. Her husband is gripped with a fever and is near death.
- We can surmise he told her he was wrestling with God over the issue of circumcision.
- Perhaps it was Zipporah who was stubbornly refusing this bloody rite.
- Zipporah is angry – beware of an angry wife with a knife.
- She takes a flint knife to do the surgery. Flint knives were the traditional knife approved for circumcision. They were razor sharp – sharper than metal knives at this time. (Joshua 6:2)
- She, instead of a priest, (if Jethro were there he would have been the one to do this). She probably made a mess of it, having never done it before and hating the whole bloody mess.
- She throws the bloody foreskin at Moses' feet (it is a euphemism for at his private parts)

Why? The Biggest Question in this Passage

- Why is this story even included here?
- What is the truth and lesson being taught to the people of God?
- Why would God try to kill Moses whom he has prepared for this job, whom he called, to whom He has made some pretty impressive promises in Exodus 4:19-23?
- Why are their two double repetitions: “*Firstborn*” and “*Bloody Husband*”?
- Misunderstanding the story and God’s intentions makes God look petty and mean.

God is not mean. Exodus 34:6-7 God himself declares his glory – who He is. He is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, loving, true, faithful, merciful, forgiving, just and jealous. That NEVER CHANGES!

Go back to the context. God is ticked off by Moses’ responses. It does not say God put his anger aside. Here is His mercy and kindness. God suggested Aaron as a spokesperson. But God, who sees the heart, knows that Moses is still the reluctant servant. He is not fully on board with God’s plan. He is HALF-COMMITTED. God doesn’t like half-hearted commitment.

In this passage God reminded him of what he is going to do to Pharaoh because of his hard heart. Somewhere in here is an indirect implication for Moses. Perhaps Moses concludes that if he still has a hard heart to believe and obey, then perhaps God will punish him as well. I think these statements concerning Pharaoh is a preface to the circumcision story is. I believe Moses probably got the point when he got deathly sick (often God’s way of waking us up) and thinks he is about to die.

The second reason I believe this to be the case is that on his deathbed Moses remembers that he had not obeyed God in the matter of circumcision of his son Gershom. God had already threatened to kill Pharaoh’s firstborn son for his hardness of heart. And God calls Israel his firstborn. Now on his sick bed Moses remembers HIS FIRSTBORN.

Panic strikes his heart. “I’m going to die! God is punishing me for my disobedience to His covenant plan.” At this point he must have told Zipporah what was going on in his mind because she gets angry that she has to circumcise her son. She reveals her heart as being even more rebellious than Moses. In fact, she comes very close to cursing God and hating Moses’ God.

She is mad! Twice she repeats her opinion of Moses and his God. She doesn’t want any part of this trip. She doesn’t feel called to go to Egypt risking her life and the life of her children. I picture her storming out of the house and the next day heading back to Jethro.

We learn that from Exodus 18 when after the Exodus and when they arrive in Midian at Mount Horeb, Jethro brings Zipporah, Gershom and Elieser to visit Moses and hear his tales of the Exodus.

THE MEANING FOR MOSES

God can’t use half-hearted people. God cannot use a half-surrendered heart. Half-hearted obedience is not obedience. We learn that later from Moses own instruction to the hard hearted people of Israel when he says in Deuteronomy 10:16, -- “*Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.*” *Moses invents the term “circumcise your heart.”* – meaning, cut off the old nature. Put off anger, bitterness, sensuality, immorality, etc. (See Deut. 30:6, Jeremiah 4:4)

In the New Testament we have many references to this circumcised heart, a new and totally surrendered heart that God is looking for. This is called circumcision of the heart. (Romans 2:29, Galatians 5:6, Galatians 6:15, Colossians 2:11, Philippians 3:3)

Then we learn from the life of Saul's life.

1 Samuel 16:7 *But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.*

And in 1 Samuel 15:23, -- *“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.”*

We learn it from David in Psalm 66:18, -- *“If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me.”*

We learn it from New Testaments warnings from the Lord to us.

Matthew 6:19-34, Luke 14:25-33 *Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me, cannot be my disciple.*

1 Corinthians 11: *But let a man examine himself...for this cause many are weak and sickly, and many have died.*

Revelation 3:14-22 *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other. So, because you are lukewarm—neither cold nor hot—I will spew you out of my mouth...Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.”*

The Lesson:

God is not playing games when He calls us to follow Him. He is looking for a wholehearted surrender of body and soul. It is total commitment or it is not commitment at all.

*Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?
Your heart does the Spirit control?
You can only be blessed,
And have peace and sweet rest,
When you yield him your body and soul.*