

Exodus Chapter 4 Continued

Exodus 4:18 "And Moses went and returned to Jethro his father in law, and said unto him, Let me go, I pray thee, and return unto my brethren which [are] in Egypt, and see whether they be yet alive. And Jethro said to Moses, Go in peace."

After 40 years Moses was still bound to his "father in law" and adoptive father, Jethro (3:1).

For Moses to "return to Egypt" and freely accomplish God's purpose, he needed to be released from his familial responsibilities.

Jethro's kindness was seen in the words "Go in peace". This was also a confirmation of the Lord's will to Moses.

"Let me go, I pray thee": Courtesy toward the father-in-law for which he worked was not overlooked because of the divine call to service as national leader. Exactly how much was explained of the encounter at the burning bush remains unknown. But the purpose for the return, "and see whether they be yet alive," suggests that specific details of the call for him to be leader/deliverer were left unsaid. In contrast to the full explanation given to Aaron (verse 28).

You see, Moses should have realized that God would go before him and make the way clear for him, just as he did with Jethro. Jethro gave no argument. It was the custom in Midian to ask the priest of the family permission to leave and go elsewhere and that is just what Moses did here. Moses did not mean just his immediate family in the statement above, but all the Hebrews. God had called him to deliver all of them.

I am sure however, that Moses was concerned after 40 years, if his mother, sister, and brother were still alive. Of course, God told him in the last lesson that his brother Aaron was still alive and was on his way to meet Moses.

Exodus 4:19 "And the LORD said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life."

Moses appears to have delayed his departure after he obtained permission to go from Jethro. Hence the address "Go, return," which is peremptory.

"All the men are dead which sought thy life": Not only the Pharaoh (Exodus 2:23), but the kindred of the murdered man, and the officials empowered by the Pharaoh to arrest Moses. As forty years had elapsed since the homicide, this is readily conceivable.

Here the apprehension that Moses had about returning could have partly come from fear of reprisal from Egypt's king. God reassured him that there would be no king waiting to kill him.

Exodus 4:20 "And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand."

“Sons”: Gershom (2:22), and Eliezer (18:4).

Moses’ shepherding stick became the “rod of God”. When we serve God, whatever is ours may become His to use for His glory.

Notice the unusualness of there being no opposition to him taking Jethro's daughter and grandsons away from Jethro. This in itself shows God's hand in all this, bringing harmony to the outcome. We know that God had sent Moses on a mission. He had a specific place to go and a specific job to do. Notice also that this rod was not a shepherd's staff, but a special rod that God had furnished for His purposes. God Himself had placed power in Moses' hand.

Exodus 4:21 "And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go. "

“I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go”: The Lord’s personal and direct involvement in the affairs of men so that His purposes might be done is revealed as God informed Moses what would take place. Pharaoh was also warned that his own refusal would bring judgment on him (verse 23).

The apostle Paul used this hardening as an example of God’s inscrutable will and absolute power to intervene as He chooses, yet obviously never without loss of personal responsibility for actions taken (Rom. 9:16-18). The theological conundrum posed by such interplay of God’s acting and Pharaoh’s acting can only be resolved by accepting the record as it stands and by taking refuge in the omniscience and omnipotence of the God who planned and brought about His deliverance of Israel from Egypt. And in so doing also judged Pharaoh’s sinfulness (see note at 9:12).

God’s statement has produced much discussion because it gives the appearance of the kind of sovereign action that prevents the operation of human choice. The book of Exodus attributes the hardening process ten times to God (verse 21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17), and nine times to the Pharaoh himself (7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34-35). The first two references (verse 21 and 7:3), state that God “will harden” the Pharaoh’s heart without specifying when that will be. The next ten references (the only exception is in 9:12), indicate that the Pharaoh hardened his own heart.

He refused to acknowledge the power of Yahweh, the God of Israel, and at times, did not even listen to the statements of the magicians themselves (8:19). There is a sense in which Pharaoh blinded himself and in so doing incurred the wrath and judgment of God. Pharaoh viewed himself as a god and expressed disdain for Yahweh from the very beginning (in 5:2), “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice ... I know not the Lord.” One must remember that God deserves the right to judge sin and the sinner whenever He desires. The sinner is subject to the wrath of God at any point in his life. God has the right to judge sin in any way He so desires the first time one commits sin. It is really the mercy of God that allows the sinner to continue to live.

Pharaoh sinned knowingly, willfully and continually (9:34): “And when Pharaoh saw that the rain ... ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart.” Paul reasoned that God hardened the Pharaoh’s heart in a free and sovereign manner, but not in a capricious or arbitrary way (Rom. 9:14-18). He always acts justly (Rom. 9:14), and in sovereign freedom (Rom. 9:18). He displays “much longsuffering” toward “the vessels of wrath” (Rom. 9:22). He gave Pharaoh numerous opportunities to free the people of Israel, but He knew in advance that the Pharaoh would choose to do otherwise. The Pharaoh would therefore be compelled to bear full responsibility for that willful and sinful choice (10:7).

This hardening of men’s hearts is one way God judges men who resist His will. Thus, He also accomplished His purposes for the people of Israel as noted (in Joshua 11:20): “It was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly.” For the cup of the iniquity of the Amorites was full (compare Gen. 15:16), and the time for judgment had come.

This is an interesting statement that we must take notice of. God will harden Pharaoh's heart. We will read later on that Pharaoh hardens his own heart and in another place, where Pharaoh's heart was hardened. It is difficult to understand why God did not just soften Pharaoh's heart and immediately take the Hebrews out.

We can quickly see that the main purpose for the delay was so that God can go through these ten worldly gods that Egypt had put so much faith in, and show one by one that they are no match for the real God. God explained to Moses ahead of time that he would run into opposition, but Moses was still to do great wonders to show up these Egyptian's false gods. We notice that God had placed the power in Moses' hand to do these wonders.

Exodus 4:22 "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel [is] my son, [even] my firstborn:"

“Israel ... my son, even my firstborn”: To the ancient Egyptians, the firstborn son was special and sacred, and the Pharaoh considered himself the only son of the gods. Now he heard a whole nation designated as God’s firstborn son, meaning “declared and treated as first in rank, preeminent, with the rights, privileges and responsibilities of being actually the firstborn.” The Lord pointedly referred to the nation collectively in the singular, in order to show that He was a father in what He would do. I.e., bring a nation into existence, then nurture and lead him (Deut. 14:1-2). Divine Sonship, as in the pagan world’s perverted concept of a sexual union between the gods and women, was never so much as hinted at in the way God used the term to express His relationship with Israel. Who were His people, a treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (6:7; 19:4-6).

For the Lord to call “Israel ... my son, even my firstborn” (Hosea 11:1; Jer. 31:9), would have offended Pharaoh (likely Amenhotep II). Who viewed himself as the favored son of the Egyptian gods.

We see that God specifically told Moses what to say. You see Moses was an oracle of God. It was as if God was speaking. And He was through Moses. God wanted Pharaoh to know that this

same Israel nation that Pharaoh had doing forced labor was actually the covenant people of God. This was the first family through which God had chosen to reveal Himself.

Exodus 4:23 And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, [even] thy firstborn.

The threat was not made until immediately before the tenth plague (Exodus 11:5). It is not recorded in the words which Moses is here directed to use; but the speech of Moses (in Exodus 11), is no doubt much abbreviated.

“Firstborn”: The expression would be perfectly intelligible to Pharaoh, whose official designation was "son of Ra." In numberless inscriptions, the Pharaohs are styled "own sons" or "beloved sons" of the deity. It is here applied for the first time to Israel; and as we learn from this scripture, emphatically in antithesis to Pharaoh's own firstborn.

You see God looks on each of us as His son. A Christian is God's son one at a time. To me the Scripture above, even though it is speaking of a large group of people, is singular in nature; because God deals with us one at a time. We see here, prophetically speaking, of the tenth plague. Which truly did take the firstborn of Pharaoh, as the firstborn of all in Egypt, except the Hebrews. God explained here, His reason for wanting them to leave Egypt (the world), was so they could serve Him. We see here a type and shadow of how the believer must leave the world behind and go and serve God.

Exodus 4:24 "And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him."

Moses was attacked by a sudden and dangerous illness, which he knew was inflicted by God. The word "sought to kill" implies that the sickness, whatever might be its nature, was one which threatened death had it not been averted by a timely act.

Zipporah believed that the illness of Moses was due to his having neglected the duty of an Israelite, by not having circumcised his own son. The delay was probably owing to her own not unnatural repugnance to a rite, which though practiced by the Egyptians, was not adopted generally in the East, even by the descendants of Abraham and Keturah. Moses appears to have been utterly prostrate and unable to perform the rite himself.

It appears that God's anger at Moses was for a very serious offense and the Lord was to bring swift punishment. Probably God struck him very sick. It appears from the next few verses that Moses had listened to his heathen wife and had not circumcised his 2nd son on the 8th day, as Abraham had agreed to do in Genesis. God keeps covenant with His people, but expects His people to keep covenant with Him. This child was probably, born after God's conversation on the holy mountain and just before this trip was begun, because this anger seems to be suddenly kindled against Moses.

Moses' wife, as you can easily see in the following Scriptures did not approve of this Hebrew practice. She thought it to be barbarian. Moses should not have listened to his wife. He was the

head of the house, and he knew very well the importance of keeping the Abrahamic covenant with God. Many a man's downfall is when he listens to bad advice from his wife. It is a very sad thing in our society today that not many men come to church. They leave the spiritual obligations to their wives.

God is not pleased with this. I am happy though, that the women are keeping it going. We see (in verse 25), that Zipporah knows what the problem was and to save Moses' life, she performed the circumcision herself. If the man does not fulfill his duty to God, the wife must do it to save their family.

Exodus 4:25 "Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast [it] at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband [art] thou to me."

The presence of Zipporah's name indicates that the personal pronouns refer to Moses. She, judging by her action of suddenly and swiftly circumcising her son, understood that the danger to her husband's life was intimately connected to the family's not bearing the sign of the covenant given to Abraham for all his descendants (Gen. 17:10-14). Her evaluation, "Surely a bloody husband art thou to me", suggests her own revulsion with this rite of circumcision, which Moses should have performed.

When a person says yes to God's service, the Lord will often begin to reveal neglected areas of obedience. Moses' failure to circumcise his second son Eliezer according to the lord's covenant with Abraham, forced a disgusted "Zipporah" to save her husband's life by circumcising the baby herself.

Here we see Zipporah performing the actual circumcision to save Moses' life, while all the time she was angry with him for this blood covenant with God. She actually threw the cut off skin at Moses' feet in contempt. It was as if she disapproved of Moses as a husband, because of his belief in God. This knife blade was made of stone, instead of metal to keep down infection.

Exodus 4:26 "So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband [thou art], because of the circumcision."

The result of Zipporah's actions (in verse 25), was God's foregoing the threat and letting Moses go. The reaction of God at this point dramatically underscored the seriousness of the sign He had prescribed (see note on Jer. 4:4).

At first here she was speaking to God, asking him to let Moses go. She expressed her dislike again for the practice of circumcision.

Exodus 4:27 "And the LORD said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he went, and met him in the mount of God, and kissed him."

During their reunion on the "mount of God" (Mount Horeb), the same location where the Lord first called Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, the biological brothers became brothers in the ministry.

God sent Moses help through his brother Aaron. The Scripture here does not explain why Moses went back to the mountain of God. Perhaps it was because of his sin in neglecting to circumcise his son. He might have wanted to make sure that God would still be with him. The whole mountain range there could have been also known as the mount of God. This was probably, Horeb. The custom of men in greeting in that part of the world was to kiss, instead of handshake. By the way, this kiss was on the cheek and not on the mouth. It certainly was not the type of kiss between a man and woman.

Exodus 4:28 "And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD who had sent him, and all the signs which he had commanded him."

He declared his mission and commission from God, and gave him the particulars of what was to be said both to the people of Israel and to the king of Egypt. And this he did, because Aaron was to be his spokesman unto them.

“And all the signs which he had commanded him”: To do, first before the children of Israel, and then before Pharaoh. Before the one to obtain credit of them, as being sent of God, and before the other to get leave of him for the departure of Israel out of Egypt.

Aaron knew that God sent him to Moses, so he was very receptive to the words of Moses. I am sure that Moses demonstrated the miracles with the rod to further assure Aaron, as he had been assured by God. We are not told anything about the trip to Egypt.

Exodus 4:29-30 "And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel:" "And Aaron spake all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people”.

The “leadership team” functioned as instructed: Aaron told all and Moses performed all the signs given to him (verse 2-9).

Aaron knew these elders, and it was not difficult for him to get them together.

This did not mean that Aaron did the signs; the miracles were in Moses' hand. It just means that Aaron, as the mouthpiece, spoke and Moses demonstrated the signs, building the confidence of the people so they would believe enough to follow Moses and Aaron. Aaron's only contact with God was through Moses, just as our only contact with God the Father is through Jesus.

Exodus 4:31 "And the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped."

“And the people believed ... bowed ... worshipped”: Just as God predicted, they responded in belief at the signs and in worship at the explanation of God’s awareness of their misery.

Here, we see these Israelites doing the very thing that pleases God. They humbled themselves (bowed their heads), and worshipped God. This worship had to do with praising Him for hearing their cry.

Exodus Chapter 4 Continued Questions

1. When Moses returned to Jethro, what did Moses ask of him?
2. What reason did Moses give Jethro for wanting to go?
3. What was Jethro's reply?
4. Who was it a custom to get permission from to leave a tribe?
5. What family was Moses really speaking of?
6. What member of Moses' physical family did God tell Moses was still living?
7. When God told Moses it was time to go to Egypt, what did He reassure Moses of?
8. Who went with Moses?
9. What did Moses have in his hand?
10. What shows God's hand at work in Moses' departure?
11. What does the rod of God indicate?
12. What was Moses to do in front of Pharaoh?
13. Why would Pharaoh not believe?
14. What were 3 different hardenings of the heart we will run into in this study?
15. What was the main purpose in the delay?
16. How many plagues will there be?
17. What did God tell Moses to call these Israelites?
18. What was God telling Pharaoh in this?
19. Where was the first mention of the slaying of the firstborn of Egypt?
20. Why was a singular noun used in meaning many?
21. Why did God want them to leave Egypt?

22. What is this a type and shadow of?
23. Suddenly in verse 24, God tried to do what to Moses?
24. Why? What was the sin?
25. Moses knew the importance of keeping what covenant?
26. Who performed the rite?
27. Was she pleased with the covenant sign?
28. Explain.
29. Why was the knife blade made of stone?
30. What did Zipporah ask of God, after she had circumcised their second son?
31. What kind of husband did she call Moses?
32. What did the Lord tell Aaron to do?
33. Where did Moses meet him?
34. What affection did the brothers show each other?
35. What did Moses tell Aaron?
36. Where did Moses and Aaron go first?
37. Why did the people believe them?
38. What similarity do we see in the relationship of Aaron to God and Christians' relationship to the Father God?
39. When the people heard that God had heard their cry, what 2 things did they do?