

Moses, a Bridegroom of Blood

Ex. 4:24-26

Introduction:

1. As part of our studies about Moses our Scripture reading comes from Ex. 4:24-26.
2. So far in our studies we have observed that Moses was a man with insight into the nature of God. But more than that, he was a man protected by the providence of God. He was empowered by God as a defender and deliverer of God's people, Israel.
3. The text before us is perplexing, partly because of its brevity. It describes a family event involving God, Moses, Moses' wife Zipporah and one of their sons, but no background information is given.
4. Reading of the text.
5. What is happening here? And what relevant lessons might we gain from it?

Discussion:

I. What is happening here?

- A. J. Kirsch in his book *Moses, A Life* (p. 130) described this text as "arguably the single most bizarre and baffling passage in all the Hebrew Bible."
- B. In addition to the lack of background information . . .
 1. It is unclear why God would seek Moses' death at this time. After all Moses has just been commissioned by God to go to Egypt and is actually on his way to do what the Lord wanted him to do. It seems odd that God would seek to put him to death.
 2. Zipporah seems to know exactly what to do to remedy the situation. What had happened in the past that led her to take this action is not explained.
 3. What she means when she identifies Moses as a "bridegroom of blood" is not clear.
- C. The background and contextual information that we do have.
 1. Circumcision had been demanded of Israelites from the time of Abraham as a sign of the covenant between God and Israel (Gen. 17:14). It represented the select status of Israel as God's people (Gen. 17:7-8). Should one not be circumcised then he was to be cut off from Israel because he had broken God's covenant (Gen. 17:14).
 2. Interestingly, in Ex. 4:22-23, Israel is identified as God's son. It is upon this basis that Pharaoh is to let Israel go, but because of Pharaoh's refusal, God says to Pharaoh, "I will kill your son." Thus the Exodus is marked by the death of the firstborn in Egypt. Thus, those in covenant relationship with God are spared and those not in covenant relationship with God die.
 3. Thus, the events that transpire here may serve as a lesson to the importance of the covenant relationship with God. There is evidence of an ancient literary tool employed here to highlight this. Cf. to a setting for a diamond in a ring, or holding a precious stone between your fingers to display its brilliance.
 - a. A chiasm is an ancient literary structure where concepts or ideas are placed in a special symmetric order for the sake of emphasis.

b. A B

X

A B

c. Firstborn (4:22-23) Circumcision (Passover; 12:43-49)

X

Circumcision (4:24-26) Firstborn (13:1, 11-15)

- d. Only those in special covenant relationship with God will escape Egypt.
- e. It is certainly incongruent with this for Moses to go down to Egypt as deliverer without having circumcised his own son. It would be like us trying to teach people the necessity of being Christians, but neglecting to teach our own children of that necessity.

II. It is suggested that Moses' neglect of the circumcision of his son stemmed from some hesitation by his wife to follow through with the action.

- A. It appears from the text that she knew just what to do to avert death in this situation.
 - 1. The antecedent to him (v. 24) is unclear. Is it Moses or is it the son?
 - 2. Whoever "him" is he is in a death grip by the Lord.
 - 3. It is evident that God does not wish to cause calamity, but graciously gives opportunity for action to be taken that death might be escaped. God would have the son to come under the covenant relationship.
 - 4. God would have all those associated with Israel come under this covenant—slaves, sojourners, hired servants (Ex. 12:43-49).
- B. The circumstance in Moses' family may have resulted from religious differences between Moses and Zipporah. Her dad, you may recall, was the priest of Midian (Ex. 2:16). For her son to be circumcised meant that he would come under covenant relationship with Moses' God. This may have constituted a violation of her family tradition.
 - 1. When there are marriages between those of different religious backgrounds there are inevitably disagreements and especially is this the case when children are involved.
 - 2. This incident may be an example of just this kind of thing.
 - 3. Zipporah and the sons were sent back to Midian (Ex. 18). It was not until Moses returned with Israel that his father in law (Jethro, Ruel) honored the Lord as "greater than all the gods," (18:11) which may indicate his on-going polytheism now included the Lord.
- C. If you want your children to be in a covenant relationship with God be cautious about who you marry.
- D. It was those in covenant relationship with God that escaped from Egypt alive.
 - 1. We know that today physical circumcision does not commend one to God.
 - 2. But we also know that God is looking for a circumcision of the heart (Col. 2:11-13).
 - a. This is a circumcision involving a cutting off to God and by implication a separation from sin (Col. 3:1ff).

- b. Col. 2:12 presents baptism as the occasion of this new life and by implication a new covenant (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 8).
- c. Children are often hindered in making this covenant by family influences.

III. If Moses was to carry out the divine commission with success he must first prove himself to be a faithful servant of God in his own house.

- A. Neglecting the circumcision of his own son did not prepare him to go to Egypt and call on others to make such a covenant commitment to God (Ex. 12:43ff). Only those circumcised could participate in the Passover (note v. 48). Only those participating in the Passover would be past over by the death angel.
- B. This principle is evident in the managerial qualifications of those who would be overseers (1 Tim. 3:4-5).
- C. Our Passover lamb is Christ. Only those in covenant relationship experience the benefits of that relationship—salvation, forgiveness, incorporation into the body of Christ, the people of God, the Israel of God.

IV. In this text we see with what earnestness God demanded the keeping of His commandments.

- A. The keeping of individual commandments is important.
 - 1. Someone might reason that circumcision was only a sign and therefore not so significant. It was indeed a sign (Gen. 17:11).
 - 2. But the sign was significant, significant enough to result in being cut off from the people of God and considered as having broken God's covenant (Gen. 17:14).
 - 3. Without circumcision Israel's firstborn would have died in Egypt just like the Egyptians.
 - 4. Without circumcision someone was going to die in Ex. 4:24. Whether Moses or his son may not be clear, but rest assured death was going to be the consequence.
- B. Was God being unfair? He was being gracious by allowing time for obedience.
- C. Such is the case today. Are you one of God's covenant people? Have you circumcised your heart? Are you cut off from sin to an exclusive relationship with God? Do not minimize this relationship. Do not minimize the baptism that God is calling you to (Col. 2:11ff).

Conclusion:

- 1. I may not know what Zipporah meant when she described Moses as a bridegroom of blood.
- 2. But this I do know. Christ Jesus is described as the bridegroom of His people today. And he gave His blood for our forgiveness and described it as the blood of the covenant.
- 3. Would you accept the benefits of that blood today?