
MOSES THE BRIDEGROOM OF BLOOD

Exodus 4:18-31

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

Most of us have seen the movie “The Ten Commandments.” Like all Hollywood adaptations, it pays little attention to what really happened. Its fanciful plot inserts numerous characters and twists of events that are nowhere to be found in the Bible, and it leaves out many that are found there. That’s why most modern readers are surprised and puzzled by a pivotal episode in Moses’ life that takes place between the time when Moses meets God in the burning bush, and when he returns to Egypt to force Pharaoh to let God’s people go.

You may remember that God rescued baby Moses from Pharaoh’s edict of death for all newborn Jewish boys. *Moses the deliverer* was first *Moses the delivered*. Moses is adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter and, thereby, for the next 40 years gets exposed to all the education and training of the ruling world-order. He tasted Egypt’s passing pleasures, and was well acquainted with its power. The best and the most Egypt had to offer was his for the taking.

However, he’s Jewish, not Egyptian. In the movie Moses is a grown man when he learns he is of the same blood as the slaves his “family” has kept in such harsh servitude. The old crone of a nurse reveals a piece of cloth with Hebrew design that was in the basket when Pharaoh’s daughter found him.

The director of “The Ten Commandments,” Cecil B. DeMille artfully avoided the truth. Moses actually discovered his Jewishness when still a young boy. He was circumcised! All the other boys he knew weren’t.

One day Moses comes upon an Egyptian taskmaster beating one of the Hebrew slaves. Thinking no one is watching, Moses tries to rescue his countryman, and ends up killing the Egyptian. He quickly buries the body in a shallow grave and returns home. The next day, Moses sees two Hebrews fighting with each other. When he comes to the aid of the one who is being picked on—the same way he had sought to deliver the Hebrew slave the day before—the aggressor in the quarrel taunts Moses: “*Who do you think you are Mr. Bigshot? Who made you the hero? Are you going to kill me like you killed the Egyptian yesterday? I’d like to see you try...*”

Moses realizes that if this slave knows about the murder, so does Pharaoh. To Pharaoh, Moses is a rebel trying to start the very insurrection he had feared. Not only does he try to find and kill Moses before the rebellion can get out of hand, but Pharaoh also clamps down on the Jews and makes their life even more difficult.

Fleeing Egypt, Moses travels to Midian in the easternmost part of present day Saudi Arabia. The people he has sought to deliver and lead have spurned him, so he settles down with a wife, Zipporah, and spends the next 40 years as a shepherd taking care of his father-in-law's sheep. This is a far cry from the courts of Egypt, and a long way from his people.

But God hears the cry of His people enslaved in Egypt. He gets Moses' attention (the burning bush) and tells Moses He is going to use him to deliver the people. Moses is not so sure he wants to be used in such a way; he already tried to rescue them once, and failed. In his attempts to decline the role God has in mind for him. Moses asks how he is supposed to convince the Jews that he really is a messenger from God. God says that he will use His Name. "*I Am Who I am;*" and He said, '*...I AM has sent me to you*'" (Exodus 3:14).

Still unconvinced, Moses wants to know what to do if the Name alone doesn't persuade the people to listen to him. Forty years ago his leadership and help were rejected, why should he risk that again? In reply, God performs for Moses the very miracles He will do before Egypt—his staff turns into a snake and back again into a stick, and his hand turns leprous as snow, then is restored like new. That convinces Moses of God's power, but Moses is no more eager than before to return to a country where he is a wanted criminal.

That's when Moses brings up his last argument. Like us, Moses misunderstands what God is looking for when He picks someone for a job. Moses compares *his* capabilities with what is needed to accomplish *God's* assignment. Being "*slow of speech and thick of tongue*" (Exodus 4:12), Moses figures he cannot be a spokesperson for God. His ploy doesn't work. God gives Moses permission to recruit Aaron, a far more polished speaker. As the events unfold, Moses relies on Aaron to speak for him to Pharaoh.

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This backdrop brings us to one of the most unusual stories in the entire Bible. As with all puzzling passages, we want to read it carefully, paying special attention to the larger context in which the story occurs *and* to the details within the story that seem to have little or no connection to the events:

"Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, 'Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive.' And Jethro said to Moses, 'Go in peace.'

Now the Lord had said to Moses in Midian, 'Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.' So Moses took his wife and sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand.

The Lord said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, "Israel is my son, my firstborn. So I said to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve [worship] Me'; but you refused to let him go. Behold I will kill your son, your firstborn.'

Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the Lord met him [Moses] and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, 'You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.' So He let him alone. At that time she said, 'You are a bridegroom of blood,'—because of the circumcision." ~ Exodus 4:18-26

Why would God try to kill the very person He has just commissioned to ministry? What possible motive could He have? If Moses had refused to do what God had asked him to do, there would be some reason for His strong disfavor toward Moses, but Moses was doing God's will. Or was he?

The larger context for this story is that Moses has already tried once to deliver the slaves by his own strength and resourcefulness. He failed. With all the natural giftings and prerogatives of earthly power as a prince of Pharaoh, he could not accomplish the deliverance of God's people. God did not choose Moses because of his former attempt at deliverance; nor because of his zeal and personal prowess. God wasn't looking for someone who had a better-than-average chance to succeed. The deliverance did not depend on Moses and his way of doing things. It depended, exclusively on God and God's way.

God would deliver them because of His covenant, not because of Moses' giftings, training, calling or strength. This is the detail within the story that holds the key to understanding why God tries to kill Moses. Moses was trying to fulfill a promise of the covenant without keeping the covenant himself. He had not circumcised his son. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant. In fact, God told Abraham that "...an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant" (Genesis 17:14).

That covenant is the reason why God tries to kill him. Moses was unintentionally doing to his son what Pharaoh was doing to the rest of the Jews. By not circumcising his son, Moses was unintentionally preventing him from being free to serve (worship) God. There is more than one way to cut God's people off from the promises He has made to them. By neglect, Moses was like Pharaoh.

The last thing God said to Moses before sending him back to Egypt was what to tell Pharaoh. Essentially, God wants the world to realize that Israel is His son, His first-born son—with all the

emotional significance attached to that fact. God is fiercely protective of His son in the same way we as earthly parents are. God tells him to tell Pharaoh to let His son [Israel] go so he can serve (worship) Him.

Most likely, Moses had not put much significance on circumcision. Growing up among Egyptian playmates and family meant that he was the only one he knew who was circumcised. It probably didn't seem like that big of a deal. He may even have been somewhat embarrassed by it. In the customs of Midian, where he has been living for 40 years, after the 40 years in Egypt, boys were circumcised at puberty, not on the eighth day after birth prescribed by the God who spoke from the burning bush.

But why circumcision? Why would God select such an odd mark for distinguishing His people from all others? Circumcision is hardly a public sign. If God wanted to let everyone know which kids belonged to Him, wouldn't a mark on the forehead be better? Why get so upset over not cutting away a little flesh? And besides, it probably hurts.

To understand the significance of circumcision, we have to go back nearly 400 years before Moses to when God made His covenant with Abraham.

At that very point where man's life-seed comes forth, there is a fold of skin that plays absolutely no part in the process of conception. Whether a man has this skin or not doesn't affect, in any way, whether he is able to reproduce. So God says to Abraham, "You can't produce a child yourself. I want you to always remember that it's not by your own ability or by the power of your flesh, but by My power that this will take place. The promise that I'm giving to you is a promise that I will fulfill apart from mere flesh."

So at the very point where conception would take place, God says, "We are going to remove that flesh so that forever you will remember that this child and all the children to come will not be on the basis of your own flesh's ability."

That is why infants were to be circumcised. It is not a public declaration about the promise of God to do things, but it is a frequent declaration. Every man on a regular basis would be reminded, it is not by the power of my flesh that this promise has been fulfilled; *it is by the power of God.*

Though physical circumcision is no longer the sign of our covenant with God, parents can find a sobering parallel in this story for how we transmit the truths of the Kingdom to our children. Too often the children of parents who experienced revival fail to reach even the same level of spiritual understanding as their parents. The reason? Those parents neglected to incorporate their children into what the parents were learning, or they failed to pass along the little understandings—like circumcision—which actually hold the essence of the big truths upon which the Kingdom is based.

The parallels for our walk with God go beyond just our parental responsibilities. Since each of us has been commissioned, like Moses, to lead others on their journey with God, we want to be careful not to fulfill our charge in the strength of our own abilities. Neither the prerogatives, nor powers of our natural upbringing (Pharaoh's court), nor our life-experiences (Midian's pastures) capacitate us as deliverers. Rather, the little points of obedience, the ultimate reliance on God's ways, enables us to lead others out of captivity and into their ministry future.