

# God Tries To Kill Moses

In Exodus chapters 3 and 4 God told Moses to go to Egypt and demand that Pharaoh release the Israelites. After some initial objections Moses agreed to go:

**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.

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.”

At this point something truly unexpected happened. As Moses went on his way to Egypt, God met him in an inn and tried to kill him:

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

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.

26 So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.”

This passage is extremely unexpected. God had just finished talking to Moses and their conversation had ended on good terms. Moses was doing exactly what God had told him and was on his way to Egypt. So why did God suddenly try to kill him? The resolution to this dire emergency is equally strange: how did

Zipporah (the wife of Moses) know what to do? For that matter, why did Zipporah have to do anything? Why wasn't Moses the one to act?

In order to understand this passage there are a few things that we need to know. First of all, the word “met” in verse 24 (“the Lord met him”) is the same Hebrew word that we find in verse 27, where it says that Aaron “met [Moses] in the mount of God”. It means that God actually met Moses *in person*. This is a theophany – a preincarnate appearance of Christ. Jesus came to meet Moses in person so that He could kill him. This is not the first time in the Old Testament that Jesus had met someone in person; in Genesis 32:24-30 the Lord spent the night wrestling with Jacob (although His intent there was obviously not to kill him).

So why was God so upset with Moses? It was because Moses had broken His covenant. When God made His covenant with Abraham He instituted circumcision. The consequences of not being circumcised were pretty dire:

**Exodus 4:14:** “And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, **that soul shall be cut off from his people**; he hath broken my covenant.”

(Incidentally, note the rather gruesome pun in the verse: if the foreskin was not cut off then the person would be cut off.)

Moses – the man God had chosen to lead the Israelites to the promised land – had failed to circumcise his own son. How could Moses possibly lead Israel when he had broken God's covenant and failed to faithfully lead his own house? God simply could not allow that, so He went and grabbed Moses.

That's right – God actually grabbed Moses. Notice how the passage says that after Zipporah performed the circumcision God “let him go”. That Hebrew word “let go” literally means “relax”. Think of it as relaxing your grip on someone. That is why Moses didn't perform the circumcision himself: since Jesus had grabbed him, Moses couldn't do anything. Zipporah was forced to

do it herself.

That brings up another question: why did Moses fail to circumcise his son? The most likely answer is Zipporah. Notice how angry she was over the whole situation and how much she hated circumcision. It's likely that Moses didn't circumcise his son because his wife was passionately against it. If that's the case then it's interesting that Zipporah – the one who had opposed her son's circumcision – had to be the one to circumcise him.

Here is something else to think about. Zipporah took the foreskin and “cast it at his feet”. Who is the word “his” referring to? One would assume that it was referring to Moses, but it doesn't make sense that she would cast it at her husband's feet; after all, he wasn't the one who was demanding it. Since Jesus was actually standing there demanding that this be done, isn't it more likely that in her anger she cast it at *His* feet? She does call him a “bloody husband”, but that's not unusual; in the Old Testament God often referred to Himself as Israel's husband (for example, see Isaiah 54:5 and Jeremiah 31:32).

After this event Moses sent Zipporah back home. The reason we know she was not with Moses when he led the Israelites out of Egypt is because when Jethro (Moses' father-in-law) came to visit Israel in the wilderness he brought along Zipporah and her children:

**Exodus 18:1:** “When Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father in law, heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people, and that the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt;

2 Then Jethro, Moses' father in law, took **Zipporah**, Moses' wife, **after he had sent her back**,

3 And her two sons; of which the name of the one was Gershom; for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land:

4 And the name of the other was Eliezer; for the

God of my father, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh:

5 And **Jethro, Moses' father in law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness**, where he encamped at the mount of God:

6 And he said unto Moses, I thy father in law Jethro am come unto thee, and thy wife, and her two sons with her."

It seems that Moses initially started out for Egypt with his wife and children, but after the encounter in the inn Moses sent Zipporah and his two sons back, and they rejoined him later. Given that Zipporah is never mentioned again and that Moses later married someone else (Numbers 12:1), it's possible that they separated after this.

Moses broke God's covenant in order to keep peace in his family – but that peace was just temporary. Not only did his disobedience almost cost him his life, but it apparently destroyed his relationship with his wife. Moses may have thought that he was buying himself a little peace, but that's not how things turned out in the end. It would have been far better if he had just obeyed God in the first place.