

07 – Sign of the Firstborn and Circumcision

Exodus (Names) - Changing the World

Dr. Leon L. Sanders Exodus 4:18-31

Leaving One House for Another

- Moses takes leave of Jethro, patriarch of the house (family) he has been part of for 40 years
 - He has been engaged with this family longer than:
 - His natural family
 - Pharaoh's (Great House) family
 - He is taking his family with him, so he asks Jethro's blessing since he will be losing his grandsons (future)

Background in one Sentence

- All who seek your life, who would impose the death sentence for your manslaughter, are dead
 - Usu. a change in religious-political entities equates to a commutation of sentence imposed *Exo 31:6-15, 21:29*
 - Basically Moses has his manslaughter charge remitted
 - This would roughly equate to our "statute of limitations" (though we have no limitation for murder)

Additional Background

- Though the Hebrews are “slaves”, they are also allowed to come and go if the work is accomplished – our understanding of slavery cannot be overlaid over their understanding, and practice, of slavery (1.646-17:30 ESV)
- Moses, in his 80's, had intimate knowledge of Aaron's capabilities which he could not have known if he had not seen him for 40 years; ergo, they have communicated frequently over the years, Aaron travels to meet Moses

Freely Travels To & From Egypt

- Remember, in America anything worth doing is worth *overdoing* and Americans pushed slavery into realms of degradation even though steeped in Christendom
- America has led, and is leading, the World in understanding how to violate the Scriptures while claiming righteousness; thus, we practice today what the Jews of the Old Testament practiced: God rejected them!

A Large Family?

- Moses' family on one donkey
 - Zipporah, his wife
 - Two sons (Gershom & Eliezer) who had to be young to ride the donkey
- Moses would have led the donkey and carried a pack



God Introducing New Concepts

- And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will *harden* his heart, so that he will not let the people go. (Ex 4:21)
- For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, " For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (Ro 9:17-18)

Natural Man Hates God

- But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1Co 2:14)
- Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, " Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness (He 3:7-8)

God Hardens by Mercy

- God, through his emissaries, witnesses to you (Pharaoh) about His will for you
 - You reject His will, you harden your heart
 - Every time you hear of God you harden your soul
- God does not unharden your soul, He is not obligated to save anyone but He does save some for all men were and are hardened sinners rejecting God (Ro 9:10-18)

No Conflict Except What You Bring

Free Will

- **Lost:** Our *free will* desires to remain in sin (Ro 6:7)
- **Saved:** Our *free will* desires to remain in Christ, flesh tempted and sins (Ro 6:14-15)
- No *free will* (LEM, LNC)

Sovereignty

- God is not the author of evil, does not tempt man to evil, is not evil (Ja 1:13)
- God is not obligated to save anyone but He does save some (His will is not *free* either) (Ro 9:18-24)

Which Question Do You Ask?

- Theodicy asks the *wrong* question: How can a sovereign God allow evil and Hell?
- The *right* question: Why does God save anyone at all for all *love* their sin and refuse the truth of God unless God mercifully reveals the truth to them by overcoming their sinful will!

God's Concept of the Firstborn

- Genesis de-emphasized the concept of the firstborn according to the flesh
 - God *chose* Abram to make a new nation rather than work through one of the old nations already present
 - God *chose* Isaac over Ishmael
 - God *chose* Jacob over Esau
 - God *chose* Joseph over his elder brothers

Exodus Emphasizes Firstborn

- Exodus begins teaching about redemption
- In redemption the firstborn is paramount
- God's firstborn, (μονογενής) is Christ
- God sacrifices His firstborn for our salvation (He 1:5; 10:12)
- He illustrates this from Exodus and through the Law

Firstborn Redeemed or Forfeited

- God emphasizes the role of the firstborn beginning with Pharaoh
 - If Pharaoh accepts God, rejects Ma'at, then his firstborn will be spared; however, he does not, his son dies
 - Under the Law, each son that opened the womb had to be redeemed by a sacrifice signifying the price God would pay for sin - His Son
 - Mary offered this for Jesus, her, and God's, firstborn son (Lk 2:21-24)

One House Against His House

- God will not save Pharaoh from his sinful heart
 - Pharaoh, priest of the "Great House" must demonstrate his power of salvation compared to God's power of salvation of His house (of which we are a part)
 - Struggle of Pharaoh (god) against Moses (who will be seen as a God to Pharaoh) who speaks for God
 - The contest is literally life or death for the innocent

Judgment Begins at Home

- For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1Pe 4:17-18)
- Before Moses can preach judgment he must practice faithfulness or face judgment which applies to **all**

Who is Who? Problem with Pronouns

- Right after God speaks of firstborn and death a difficult passage is introduced
- The Western worldview believes God is "attacking" Moses for not circumcising his son; yet, this is not **explicitly** stated in the Hebrew text
 - This becomes the interpretation of translators based on their worldview and tradition

My Understanding

- This passage is preceded by the discussion of the firstborn, not because it occurred immediately before this, but because it conceptually explains what will occur (Ex 4:24-26)
- The reader of Moses' day would have understood the "he's" of this passage but by the time of the Talmud this text suffered from conflation, even today

Moses Must Obey God

- Moses is traveling to be the “prophet” of God (Ex 4:10)
 - Moses must obey the current precepts of God if he is to be the spokesman of God; i.e., circumcision (Ex 17:9-14)
 - It appears that Moses’ “firstborn” son has not been circumcised and therefore cannot be part of God’s people
 - It also appears that this may not have occurred due to Zipporah not being a believer of God, making the transition to being a Hebrew mother with a Hebrew son

Besides...

- What woman would naturally seek to harm her son’s reproductive future, and thus her future, in order to save a husband who is past his prime and following his God on a suicide mission?
- If Moses was the one being “attacked” Zipporah would have saved her son and probably have left Moses to his fate with his God

Why Zipporah

- Zipporah performed the circumcision, not because Moses was incapacitated, but because he would not *risk her wrath and save his son* (cowardence already observed)
 - She would participate to save her son
 - Her actions saved her son but her compliance appears to have been less than enthusiastic
 - Did she truly believe?

Who Should Have Circumcised?

- While Moses was a man of anger, he was not a leader
 - Leader would not have been happy being inactive 40 years in isolation, Moses appears happy making a life
 - He was not active in evangelizing his family in the faith of the true God (The faith of Jethro was at best lacking the knowledge of Abraham if not outright idolatry)

Duty to Circumcise

- The duty to circumcise was Moses, even if his wife and patriarchal family did not understand or approve
- He did not undertake to address this regression before traveling to Egypt to be a leader to people who had to obey this commandment of God
- Even in this "crisis" Moses is standing by forcing his wife to perform the duty (not unknown to Midians)

Bridegroom of Blood

- This phrase can have other translations such as
 - The Hebrew (**ḥāṭān**) can mean son-in-law/bridegroom or it can also mean circumciser
 - The former makes little sense
 - The latter justifies Zipporah's complaint to Moses that he should have performed this duty, been the leader, not her
 - Thus, **Moses** endangered Gershom by being unfaithful to God (http://fbq.jewishbible.org/assets/uploads/332/332_ChutanL.pdf)

On to Egypt

- Now that Gershom, Moses' firstborn, is covered by God's covenant Moses can continue to be God's prophet to Pharaoh
- He meets Aaron, they meet with the elders in Egypt, the signs are performed and the people worship God
- The true test of faith is yet to begin - for everyone!

