**Exodus 4:18-31**

[*https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-4/exodus-418-31/*](https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-4/exodus-418-31/)

*All of Moses’ objections have now been answered, and he was convinced that the LORD would be with him as he goes back to Egypt. But there was another confrontation between the LORD and Moses concerning his son not being circumcised. Once that issue was resolved, Moses and Aaron could return to Egypt and speak to the leaders of Israel in Egypt, persuading them through Aaron’s words and Moses’ miraculous signs. There are four sections to this passage:*

* *Moses returned to Egypt (18-20)*
* *The LORD instructed Moses (21-23)*
* *The LORD confronted Moses (24-26)*
* *Moses and Aaron began their ministry (27-31)*

Moses finally obeyed the command of God to return to Egypt. Moses *departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law*, apparently as an expression of respect and also to get his family. Moses then asked his father-in-law by asking permission to leave Midian – *Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive*. It is not recorded here whether Moses told Jethro about the burning bush and his God-given role as deliverer. Moses did not give Jethro the same reason the LORD gave him for going back to Egypt. Whatever else Moses told Jethro, it was acceptable, because *Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.”*

With Jethro’s permission to depart to Egypt, *Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.”* Note that the LORD’s reason for Moses to go back to Egypt was because the people who wanted to execute him are all dead. Apparently, an arrest warrant did not extend past the lifetime of the Pharaoh (probably Thutmose III in this case) who issued it. So, there was no danger for Moses to go back to Egypt.

Having Jethro’s blessing to leave, *Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt*. What is interesting in this verse (20) is the reference to Moses “sons.” Up to this point, only one son has been mentioned – Gershom ([Exodus 2:22](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+2.22&t=NASB95)). His other son, Eliezer, is not mentioned until [Exodus 18:4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+18.4&t=NASB95).

Another important item Moses *took* to Egypt (along with his family) was *the staff of God in his hand*. Before, it was just a shepherd’s staff used to guide and protect the flocks. God had turned it into a serpent and back to a staff to display His sovereignty ([Exodus 4:2-4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+4.2-4&t=NASB95)). Now, it represented the power of God. This was the staff that figured prominently in the plagues and in several events during the Exodus.

In verses 21 – 23, the LORD gave Moses instructions about what he was to do when he got back to Egypt. He said that *When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power*. The first item on the agenda was to do miracles (or “wonders”) in the presence of Pharaoh. But the LORD warned him that, in spite of these wonders, He *will harden his*(that is, Pharaoh’s)*heart so that he will not let the people go*. God is preparing Moses. It will appear to him that he is failing, but in reality, Pharaoh’s stubbornness is part of God’s plan. Sometimes God does not tell us whether what He leads us to do will be accepted, He just asks us to trust. But in this case Moses is forewarned that his message will be rejected.

After the wonders and subsequent rejection by Pharaoh, Moses was to relay a message from the LORD to Pharaoh. It began with *Thus says the Lord*, telling Pharaoh that this was not from Moses but from Moses’ God. Moses was to tell Pharaoh that *Israel is My son, My firstborn*. This formed the basis for what follows. The word “son” is significant here because it signifies that the people of Israel are considered an adopted son who, as the divine heir, were to be rulers of the Promised Land given by the LORD (See Hebrews commentary on inheriting as a son).

The LORD continued telling Pharaoh *So I said to you, ‘Let My son go that he may serve Me’; but you have refused to let him go.* The LORD’s son belonged to Him, not Pharaoh, and Pharaoh needed to recognize this. Because Pharaoh had refused to let the LORD’s people (i.e. His “firstborn”) go, he will suffer consequences. What are those consequences? *Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn*. In other words, if Pharaoh does not free the LORD’s firstborn, He will kill Pharaoh’s firstborn.

What the LORD was telling Pharaoh (who considered himself to be a god) is that the Israelites belonged to Him, and they needed to be freed in order to serve and worship Him. Not freeing them was to have fatal results.

The third part of this passage (verses 24 – 26) is an incident that happened on the way back to Egypt. It happened *at the lodging place on the way*. Where this “lodging place” was or to what this is referring is unknown. It was simply a place to rest along the way from Midian to Egypt. What happened here is *that the Lord met him and sought to put him to death*.

Notice that “him” in verse 24 is not identified as Moses or anyone else. Most assume that it refers to Moses because of the reference to “bridegroom” by Zipporah, Moses’ wife, in the next verse.

Also, there was no specific reason noted for the LORD to want to kill him. However there is an indication in the next verse (25) when it says that *Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and threw it at Moses’ feet*. Somehow Zipporah knew that the reason the LORD sought to end Moses’ life was because his son (either Gershom or Eliezer) was not circumcised. Although we are not told specifics, it could be inferred that Moses did not circumcise his sons because of objections from his wife. And because he listened to his wife he was in jeopardy of death. If this is the case, it is similar to Adam, who refused to intervene then listened to his wife and knowingly sinned. It appears that Zipporah reluctantly did the circumcision herself, rather than Moses doing it over her objections. Moses will not stand up to his wife but is being sent to stand up to the most powerful man n the world.

The name of the son was not given, and Zipporah’s action involved the rite of circumcision. Some have also suggested that the phrase “threw it at Moses’ feet” is better understood as “touching” Moses’ feet.

After she circumcised her son, *she said* (presumably to Moses) “*You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.”* This strange phrase is probably best explained to mean that Zipporah did not like the idea of circumcision. Throwing the foreskin at Moses’ feet might show this as well. She was a Midianite, and apparently circumcision was not important in their culture. According to [Exodus 18:2 – 3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+18.2+%E2%80%93+3&t=NASB95), Zipporah and the sons may have returned to her father at this time.

Following the incident, *He let him alone*. This means that Zipporah’s action saved Moses’ life from God’s judgment. The story closes by repeating Zipporah’s disgust at performing the circumcision and her repulsion at Moses when *she said, “You are a bridegroom of blood”— because of the circumcision*.

This story initially seems strange. At first glance it seems a diversion in the text of the book of Exodus. It interrupts a smooth-running story of the LORD’s calling of Moses. Since it follows Moses’ reluctant compliance to this calling, it probably is designed to teach us that the servant of the LORD must be obedient. Circumcision is required to be a leader of God’s chosen people, the descendants of Abraham ([Genesis 17:11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+17.11&t=NASB95)). It may also reemphasize that God’s power can be used to work through reluctant, imperfect people. Moses asked God to choose someone else, then was unwilling to cross his wife in order to obey God’s command. But God’s power will work through Moses to make him one of the greatest men of the Bible.

The fourth section of this passage (verses 27-31) continues the narrative of verse 23. It centers on the reunion of Moses and Aaron. Aaron was probably in Egypt when *the Lord said to Aaron, “Go to meet Moses in the wilderness.”* Obeying the LORD, *he went and met him at the mountain of God*. The “mountain of God” is Horeb, better known as Mount Sinai (3:1). As the LORD predicted (4:14), Aaron was happy to see Moses after forty years and *kissed him*, a typical greeting between family members. So *Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which He had sent him*. This included His concern for His people and His plan to deliver the Israelites from Egypt and Aaron’s role in this. Moses also told him of *all the signs that He had commanded him to do* which would validate the fact that the LORD was the source of the Moses’ message to the Israelites and Pharaoh.

Having arrived in Egypt, *Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel*. The “elders” were the established authority over the Israelites. As the LORD wanted (4:16), *Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses*. Not only did he speak the word of the LORD, *He then performed the signs in the sight of the people*. “He” probably refers to Moses, not Aaron because Aaron was to the mouthpiece for Moses, but Moses’ role as deliverer was validated by performing the signs (miracles). The result of the words and confirming signs is that *the people believed***.**Moses was probably relieved by this (4:1), and it also shows that what the LORD says will happen (4:5).

The people responded in faith *when they heard that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction***,** and in an act of faith and gratefulness, *they bowed low and worshiped*. The word for “worshiped” can also be translated “to prostrate oneself.” The people recognized that they were in the presence of those whom the LORD sent to deliver them, and they responded appropriately – worship of the One who deserves it.

**Biblical Text:**

**18Then 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.”** **19Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.”** **20So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand.**

**21The Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. 22Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Israel is My son, My firstborn.** **23So I said to you, ‘Let My son go that he may serve Me’; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.”’”**

**24Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the Lord met him and sought to put him to death.** **25Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and [**[**p**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=exodus+4&version=NASB#fen-NASB-1627p)**]threw it at Moses’ feet, and she said, “You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.”** **26So He let him alone. At that time she said, “*You are* a bridegroom of blood”— because of the circumcision.**

**27Now the Lord said to Aaron, “Go to meet Moses in the wilderness.” So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him.** **28Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him *to do*.** **29Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel;** **30and Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people.** **31So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped.**